

*Mayibuye iAfrika!*  
**A Grounded Theology of Land Restitution in South Africa**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that both this thesis and the research upon which it is based are my own work.

David Stewart Gillan



## Thesis Abstract

The research upon which this thesis is based employed a qualitative methodology and a grounded approach to theory with selected communities of the Back to the Land Campaign of the rural dispossessed in South Africa between 1992 and 1996. The irruption of rural black land-less communities before, during and after the historic April 1994 elections forms the immediate political and historical context for the research. The thesis foregrounds the voices of those who have been said, wrongly, to be 'voiceless'. Its scope is land restitution, within the wider context of land reform.

It is the argument of this thesis that a theology of land restitution grounded in the discourse and praxis of communities forcibly removed from their ancestral land under apartheid is a multivalent integrality of the religio-cultural, the historical-legal and the socio-economic and political. It proceeds from an integral world-view in which, despite three and a half centuries of aggressive western presence, there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and the physical dimensions of land in the life of the communities. In contrast to a heterogeneous cultural surface, there is a subjacent integrity of ancestral tradition with respect to land, requiring a reading of both surface and subjacent texts. The land is the nexus of this multivalent integrality, and as such is an intimate player in the identity discourse and history of its people. This multivalent integrality is to be seen in the context of a traditional African view of life that is inherently relational, involving an extended community of land, ancestors, current and future generations, and God. Thus land, and the struggle for land restitution, is a *locus theologicus* in rural land-less communities. As such, a grounded approach to land restitution must employ a holistic hermeneutics that conjoins religio-cultural analysis with historical, legal, environmental, socio-economic and political analyses.

The relationship between the *borapedi* (spirituality) and praxis of rural land-less communities is thus of crucial significance to a grounded approach to land restitution. In the event the *borapedi* of the communities is marked by an inclusive inter-traditionality, involving African ancestral, biblical and western Christian traditions. The reciprocal influence of *borapedi* and praxis issues in an approach to strategy which may be described as prophetic pragmatism. The biblical hermeneutics of rural land-less communities is marked by a participative relational interplay between interpreter and text, wherein relational hermeneutical pathways, particularly those of shared suffering, struggle and celebration, are employed in the hermeneutical and practical dimensions of a praxis of land restitution that seeks to be liberative and transformative.

The struggle of rural black women for land forms an irruption within the irruption, critiquing and contesting the systemic patriarchy of both African customary law and practice and of apartheid. A women's *hermeneutics* of land restitution provides South Africa with an opportunity to journey beyond the conflict of patriarchies (*Lefatse la Bo'Ntat'a Rona versus Die Vaderland*) inherent in ancestral hermeneutics, in the struggle for an inclusive praxis of relational humanity on the land.

A grounded theology of land restitution has wide-ranging implications for the struggles - black, white and green, male and female - of rural land-less communities for land restitution, for the process of policy formation with respect to land reform in South Africa, for the disciplines of biblical hermeneutics and theological ethics, and for the praxis of the churches with respect to their own land.

**in memoriam**

This thesis is presented in memory of Sarah Kerr Gillan (1907-1970), Christine Caldwell MacAulay (1907-1994), and Elizabetha Bakoetse Nkhereanye (1919-1995), my grandmothers in life and faith,

**and is dedicated to**

past generations of South Africans who endured the impoverishment and indignity of dispossession and who have 'become late' before they could see the return of their people to their ancestral land; current generations who, belonging to the land as the land belongs to them, are engaged in the ongoing struggle for land restitution and community transformation, seeking to root their inclusive vision of a shared land and life in the consciousness of all South Africans; and future generations, for whom the land is held in trust.

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACLA	Advisory Commission on Land Allocation
AFRA	Association for Rural Advancement
ANC	African National Congress
ASCA	African Spiritual Churches Association
AWB	Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
BAC	Barolong Action Committee
BC	Black Consciousness
BLC	Back to the Land Campaign
CAIC	Council of African Independent Churches
CALS	Centre for Applied Legal Studies (WITS)
CBO	Community-Based Organisation
CLC	Community Land Conference
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CRLR	Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights
DLA	Department of Land Affairs (from 1994)
DFU	Drakensberg Farmers Union
DRLA	Department of Regional and Land Affairs (to 1994)
EAB	Ecumenical Advice Bureau
EATWOT	Ecumenical Association of Third World Theologians
GG	Government Garage
ICT	Institute for Contextual Theology
JB TSA	Journal of Black Theology for South Africa
J TSA	Journal of Theology for Southern Africa
LAMOSA	Land Access Movement of South Africa
LAPC	Land and Agricultural Policy Centre
LRC	Legal Resources Centre
NGK	Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk / Dutch Reformed Church
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NLC	National Land Committee
NP	National Party
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PLOEG	Plattelandse Ontwikkelingsnetwerk vir Eenheid Gemeenskapprojekte
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RWM	Rural Women's Movement
SACBC	South African Catholic Bishops Conference
SACC	South African Council of Churches
SAP	South African Police
SPP	Surplus Peoples Project
TLRC	Transvaal Land Restoration Committee
TRAC	Transvaal Rural Action Committee
UCT	University of Cape Town
UNISA	University of South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WRF	WITS Rural Facility



## INTRODUCTION

Toward a Grounded Theology of *Mayibuye iAfrika!*

It is inevitable that in working for Freedom some individuals and some families must take the lead and suffer: The Road to Freedom is via the Cross. *Mayibuye! Afrika! Afrika! Afrika!*

Albert Luthuli, 1952<sup>1</sup>

If you could take the people from the ground there, and put them into places of authority, and even give them a chance to say things the way they know them and the way they understand them, to give their experiences, you would be surprised!

Archbishop N.H. Ngada, 1994<sup>2</sup>

*Mayibuye iAfrika!* Come back Africa! The exhortation is to Africa to return to those to whom it belongs and who belong to it, and to return to itself in all its beauty and force of life. Of the reciprocal greetings which have characterised the meetings, rallies, conferences and congresses of the struggle for a new South Africa, '*Mayibuye iAfrika! - iAfrika Mayibuye!*' has been the call most rooted in the suffering, most inextricably bound to the identity, and most powerfully articulate of the vision of the people whom successive white polities dating from 1652 have dispossessed from the land. In the event, it is a communal chiasmus, a kinetic oral experience, signalling the participative relationality of the struggle for land and justice in South Africa.<sup>3</sup> It is multivalent in both its signification and significance, at once religio-cultural, historical-legal and socio-economic and political. As Albie Sachs has argued, it addresses land struggles black, white and green, uniting people and land in a community of life: 'When we say "*Mayibuye iAfrika*", come back Africa, we are calling for the return of legal title, but also for the restoration of the land' (Sachs 1990: 140).

<sup>1</sup> Albert Luthuli, 'The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross,' first published in 1952, reproduced in *Let My People Go*, London, 1962, p.211.

<sup>2</sup> Archbishop N.H. Ngada, unpublished interview, 27 September, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Nelson Mandela, for example, remembers his first moments with the crowd gathered on the Grand Parade in front of Cape Town's City Hall following his release from Victor Verster Prison on 11 February 1990 as follows: 'I raised my fist to the crowd, and the crowd responded with an enormous cheer. Those cheers fired me anew with the spirit of the struggle. "*Amandla!*" I called out. "*Ngawethu!*" they responded. "*iAfrika!*" I yelled; "*Mayibuye!*" they answered' (Mandela 1994: 555).

The multivalent significance of the land in the lives of black South Africans has been articulated in countless meetings, workshops, consultations and conferences with land-less communities at local, regional and national levels. An often-quoted statement is that of Petros Nkosi, made as part of his opening remarks at a meeting in July 1989, early in the days of the transition period, called to discuss the formation of a regional committee to represent the land struggles of seventeen rural committees in the south-eastern Transvaal:

*Umhlaba*, the land. Our purpose is the land, that is what we must achieve. The land is our whole lives: we plough it for food, we build our homes from the soil, we live on it and we are buried in it. When the whites took our land away from us we lost the dignity of our lives. We could no longer feed our children. We were forced to become servants, we are treated like animals. Our people have many problems, we are beaten and killed by the farmers, the wages we earn are too little to buy even a bag of mealie-meal. We must unite together to help each other and face the Boers. But in everything we do we must remember that there is only one aim and one solution and that is the land, the soil, our world (in Claassens 1990:27).

The holistic approach to land on the part of dispossessed black South Africans ('the land is our whole lives') requires an inter-disciplinary approach to research that conjoins religio-cultural, historical-legal, environmental, socio-economic and political analyses. Further, the need for what I will call a 'grounded' approach to land restitution, one that foregrounds the voices, analyses and strategies of land-less communities, families and individuals, has been recognised by a wide variety of actors and authors in political (Sachs 1990), legal (Claassens 1991a), developmental (Levine *et al* 1994) and theological (ASCA 1985; ICT 1990, SACC 1991a) spheres. An introduction both to research method and to the historical and political context in which the research was conducted is thus in order. In the event, the immediate context of the research, both influenced by and influential for the wider context, is provided by the irruption of rural, black, land-less communities into the land agenda of a changing South Africa. We will begin with the senses - ethico-political, religio-cultural and methodological - in which the research may be said to be 'grounded', move from there to a consideration of the irruption of rural land-less communities into the national land agenda, and then examine the question of grammar and language with respect to theology in a context of transition. An introduction to the chapters of the thesis will then follow.

### **A. Why a *Grounded* Theology of Land Restitution?**

The research upon which this thesis is based was conducted in response to the concerns of the South African Council of Churches (SACC) and the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) that the voices of people at the local level, in communities which suffered

forced removal under apartheid, be heard in the elaboration of a community-based theology of land restitution. This concern recognised the dominance to that point of theological elites in the development of a theology of land, resulting, however unintended, in the marginalisation of the voices of the dispossessed themselves. Further, it emphasised the imperative nature of the need for the discourse and praxis of land-less communities to be heard in the ethico-political, historical, and legislative debates on the way to a new South Africa (Claassens 1991a; Sachs 1990; Villa-Vincencio 1992). Following initial work in 1991-1992 in the SACC's Ad Hoc Committee on a Theology of Land Ownership (Cilliers *et al* 1991), and in the ICT's Working Group on a community-based approach to a liberative and transformative theology of land (Bhiman and Gillan 1992), the current research initiative was undertaken.

The ICT research proposal, entitled 'Theologies of the Land: A Community Approach,' was drafted in the ICT Research Department in response to a resolution of the 1990 annual general meeting which identified the issue of land restitution as one that was crucial for 'any just resolution for the future of South Africa,' and which called for a 'peoples' history' of dispossession, resistance and the struggle for restitution. The proposal, dated June 1992, identified the struggles of dispossessed communities for the restoration of their ancestral land as presenting the Church with one of its most critical challenges in the transition period. This challenge, as many have noted (SACC 1991c), has two basic aspects or moments: the Church is called to active solidarity in support of land-less communities and families who are struggling for land restitution, and the Church is called to review its own theology and practice of land ownership and land use in light of the praxis of dispossessed communities. Further, it was acknowledged that many of those struggling on the ground for land restitution are themselves members of the Church, and that it is thus misleading to speak of the Church and of the rural dispossessed as if they were mutually exclusive categories of people. In the event there is considerable overlap between the two, a recognition that has major theological and missiological implications with respect to land restitution, as will be seen below. The ICT proposal concerned itself with the first of these two inter-related moments in the challenge to the Church:

In the knowledge that many organisations are working to support the struggles of dispossessed communities (e.g. The National Land Committee and its affiliates throughout the country; the Legal Resource Centre, the WITS Centre for Applied Legal Studies; the SACC and SACBC), it is our aim to go to the communities themselves and document their narrations, spiritualities and theological reflections on land restitution in their own words. In this way we hope to avoid duplicating the solidarity work of others. Emerging from the initial phase of hearing and documenting the discourse of the communities, we wish to explore its implications for a critique of Euro-centric conceptualisations and theologies of

land, with special reference to the themes of conquest, dispossession and despoliation (Bhiman and Gillan 1992:1).

The goals of the ICT research project are stated as follows:

The primary goal of the project is to facilitate the hearing and understanding of the theologies and spiritualities of land of communities that have been forcibly removed from their ancestral land and who are struggling to regain it, or having regained it, to restore their lives on it. It is our intention that a wider hearing and understanding of a community-based theology of land restitution will play a significant role in the historical-legal and socio-economic and political aspects of their struggles, and contribute to policy formation on land restitution at the national level (1992:3).

The proposal, which outlined a four-phase process of research, analysis and evaluation (Pilot Phase; Analysis and Evaluation of Pilot, and Interim Report; Main Community Research Phase; Analysis, Evaluation and Final Report), called for the involvement of participants from land-less communities (local land committees, women's organisations, traditional and elected leaders, and church bodies), researchers, theologians (professional, pastoral and lay, from 'mainline' and 'indigenous' churches), lawyers, historians (academic and local), farmers, and staff members from NGOs like the National Land Committee and affiliates. As it happened, the proposal found favour but no funding. Cut-backs in the funding of both the ICT and SACC in the early 1990s left the ICT Working Group and the SACC Ad Hoc Committee bereft of a budget for the research. Thus it was that what began in committee was taken forward in community on a shoe-string budget - a not inappropriate state of affairs given the paucity of resources available to rural land-less communities in general, but debilitating nonetheless. The acknowledgements, above, may be taken as an indication of the many people and bodies without whom the research would have remained on the cutting floor of the respective budget committees.

Adapted from the initial proposal in the light of changing dynamics in South Africa at local and national levels, for example the ongoing irruption of the rural dispossessed and its influence on the pre-election (April 1994) stages of the transition,<sup>4</sup> and in consultation with colleagues and community leaders, my research focused on three tasks: first, the task of hearing and documenting a theology of land restitution grounded in the discourse and praxis of communities forcibly removed from their ancestral land; second, the task of rightly

<sup>4</sup> The irruption began in earnest with the launch of a nationally-co-ordinated Back to the Land Campaign in March 1991, following regional meetings in 1989 and 1990 of communities that had been forcibly removed from their land under apartheid; the launch of the Rural Women's Movement in 1990, with TRAC and Mam Lydia Kompe in the role of midwife, uniting and facilitating the 'irruption within the irruption' of black rural women seeking the recognition of their right to own land in their own name, fighting the systemic patriarchy of both apartheid and African customary law; and the formation of regional community-based organisations like the Transvaal Land Restoration Committee (TLRC) in 1991. The irruption is discussed in more detail below.

understanding that grounded discourse and praxis of land restitution; and third, the task of weighing its significance in the following spheres: the ongoing land struggles (physical and representational) of land-less communities; the national ethico-political policy debate concerning land restitution, reconstruction and development in the transition period; the question of method in theological ethics and biblical hermeneutics; and the praxis of the Church with respect to both the struggles of land-less communities and the allocation and use of its own land. It should be noted from the outset that each of the three tasks was approached in an inclusive manner, with members of the communities involved not only in articulating a local theological ethics of land restitution but also in analysing their discourse and praxis, and in debating and implementing strategies at local and national levels. Indicative of the community-based nature and of the inter-relatedness of all three tasks is the final sentence of the Back to the Land Campaign's *Memorandum to the Multi-Party Negotiators from Rural Communities Seeking Restoration of their Land*, dated 25 June, 1993, which stated, 'The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return. *Mayibuye!*' As discussed in chapter two below, this statement conjoins religio-cultural analysis with historical-legal and socio-economic and political analysis - a hallmark of what we will call the grounded hermeneutics of the land struggle in South Africa, wherein hermeneutics, as much as the soil itself, is a terrain of struggle.

Thus, in answer to the question, 'Why a *grounded* theology of land restitution?' there are three senses in which the thesis may be said to be 'grounded'. *First*, it is grounded in the struggles, concomitantly religio-cultural, historical-legal, socio-economic and political, of rural, land-less black communities for the restitution of their ancestral lands and the restoration of their lives on that land. In this sense the popular locative 'on the ground' signals the socio-economic and political location of the research. The thesis seeks to document, analyse and evaluate the theological-ethical discourse and praxis of those who were forcibly removed from their land under apartheid, numbering in all more than 3.5 million black South Africans,<sup>5</sup> and

<sup>5</sup> The figure of 3.5 million is that of the Surplus Peoples Project, which reported in 1983 in a five-volume study (cf. Surplus People's Project, ed., *Forced Removals in South Africa - 5 Volumes*, Johannesburg, 1983), and again in 1985 in a summary presentation of its findings (cf. L. Platzky and C. Walker, *The Surplus People: Forced Removals in South Africa - A Report for the Surplus People Project*, Johannesburg, 1985). While the statistics were challenged initially by white government officials, the study has become accepted as the closest estimate we have of those who were forcibly removed during the apartheid era - to 1983. The number includes the evictions of farm workers and labour tenants as well as various types of community removals (e.g. 'black spot removals'); it must thus be noted that the struggle of communities for the restoration of ancestral land is but part of the wider struggle for land restitution in South Africa. Further, the number 3.5 million does not include those forcibly removed after the study of the Surplus Peoples Project, nor does it include those who, while not removed, were victims of the 'incorporation' of their land into one of the ten putative 'homelands' - a strategy adopted by the apartheid state in the mid-1980s, which allowed it to proclaim the end of forced removals while continuing with its programme of 'homeland consolidation'. Communities threatened with incorporation in the

who have now begun to regain their land in the period of transition. Refusing to play the role of spectators in the restoration of their land, and constrained by their own sense of necessity and justice, dispossessed communities have chosen to act, and to act united in solidarity with each other, to regain their land. In so doing, they have chosen to be the subjects and authors of their own history, including the narration of a subversive *memoria passionis* (Benjamin 1969; Hewitt 1994; Metz 1980; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1983), and not merely the objects of someone else's History. It is a move away from victim politics, and beyond it, and it is for this reason that the phrase 'from below' will be used sparingly in this thesis. While this term accurately identifies the socio-economic and political location of those who have been dispossessed and impoverished under apartheid, it also tends to reinforce that location in the consciousness of those who use it, to disempowering effect. It implies that the location 'from below' is fixed, static and does not admit of change. The word 'grounded' thus seems a better choice with respect both to its denotation and connotation. The rural dispossessed have irrupted into the land agenda of the new South Africa and have begun to pull it closer to the ground. This irruption, including the 'irruption within the irruption' of rural black women with respect to their land rights, will be introduced in more detail below.

*Second*, the thesis is grounded in the land itself as a nexus of the spiritual and the physical in the integral worldview of rural landless communities. Rejecting the western dichotomisation between the sacred and the profane, the communities experience and understand the land to be the site of a multivalent integrality of the religio-cultural, familial-social, agricultural, economic and political. The land and its people (including past, present and future generations) form a community of existence, wherein land is an interactive player in the inclusive and participatory relationality of life in the communities. The land is thus an inherent part of the identity and humanity of its people; indeed, the people of South Africa call themselves 'sons and daughters of the soil.' Land is also a hermeneutical key to the history of its people, related as a *memoria passionis* in communities uprooted from their land and their lifelines, both visible and invisible, to it. Further, the land is a *locus theologicus*, having both surface and subjacent texts, particularly with respect to the graves of the ancestors, with whom current generations are in ongoing communication and community. The land and struggles for it must thus be 'read' with an ancestral hermeneutics, conjoining the religio-cultural and familial-social with the historical-legal and the political. With respect to biblical hermeneutics,

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1980s were fighting not bulldozers and the removal trucks of the Government Garage, but 'the drawings of a pen' on a map in Pretoria (cf. 'Fighting the drawings of a Pen' - Braklaagte's *Struggle against Incorporation*, TRAC, Johannesburg, 1989).



within the broader category of the religio-cultural, aspects of both African and Black, in(ter)culturation and liberation, theologies are in evidence. It is thus from within this multivalent integrality that the thesis approaches the crucial question of the significance of contending spiritualities and conceptualisations of land for the historical conflicts in South Africa over land ownership, use and ecology (e.g. land as gift from God to be held in trust in community; land as saleable commodity to be owned and exploited privately). In this sense the thesis is grounded in a community of belonging; that is, the community of belonging of land to people and of people to land.

While the historical-legal, socio-economic and political dimensions of the irruption of the rural dispossessed have been documented by NGOs like the NLC, TRAC, AFRA and the SPP, and various anthologies have treated the legal, political, agricultural and environmental aspects of the land question in general (Cock and Koch, eds., 1991; De Klerk, ed., 1991; Murray and O'Regan, eds., 1990; Ramphela and McDowell, eds., 1991; Van der Walt, ed., 1991), the religio-cultural, and specifically the theological-ethical, dimensions of the irruption, so inherent in it, have not received the same degree of attention in the literature.<sup>6</sup> Indicative of the need for the documentation and consideration of the theological discourse and praxis of land-less communities is the following exchange with Archbishop N.H. Ngada of the African Spiritual Churches Association:

**Ngada:** You see the land issue, Thabo<sup>7</sup>, is so intertwined with the African Indigenous Churches. So intertwined! And it's a pity that things are done and are said through some church structures, and these structures are the structures which need people with some degrees, who are academically -

**Q:** Qualified -

**Ngada:** Qualified. But if you could take the people from the ground there -

**Q:** Yes.

**Ngada:** - and put them into places of authority, and even give them a chance to say things the way they know them and the way they understand them, to give their experiences - you'd be surprised!<sup>8</sup>

There is a sense in which this thesis is an attempt to document that 'surprise'.

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<sup>6</sup> Notable exceptions are the articles in the Land Issue of the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa*, published in November 1991, and the work of Weli Mazamisa (1994, 1995), which will receive attention in chapter one below.

<sup>7</sup> 'Thabo' is the name by which I am known in the churches and townships where I work. The name was given to me in 1986 by members of the Mothers' Union of the Lesotho Evangelical Church, and travelled with me when I was transferred to Johannesburg in 1987. It means 'joy' or 'happiness'.

<sup>8</sup> Second Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev. Kenosi Mofokeng, ASCA Institute, Braamfontein, 27 September, 1994, unpublished, p.14.

At the same time, associated with Ngada's affirmation of voices 'from the ground' is his critique of academic researchers and western conceptual impositions in general. Decrying researchers who 'carry away our words' and do not report back following the period of 'data collection' concerning what they have 'made of our words,' Ngada like most leaders of AICs (Makhubu 1988), wants to enable the Spiritual Churches (*Dikereke tsa Moea*) to speak for themselves (ASCA 1985). In a discussion of the importance of land in the community of past, present and future generations, involving a consideration of the importance of the graves of the ancestors and of the custom of hiding or burying the umbilical cord in the place of birth, the following exchange took place:

**Q:** Is there a separation in your mind between a religious use of land, for burial for example, and a use of land for grazing, ploughing, and for residence? Or is it integrated? All part of a whole?

**Ngada:** Well, before we had these 120 studies from the west! - [loud laughter all around] - there was no difference! There was nothing 'religious', nothing 'traditional', on the one hand, and then agricultural or whatever on the other hand. To us it was just the land that was given to us by God and that's all. And we were using it the right way! For every reason. Well, sociologists, psychologists and scientists can cut up - they can divide the life up. Because to us it's just fundamentally, I mean, religious, if it is, quote, 'religious'. They can say it's religious, and well it's a sociological thing or whatever or scientific Thabo or whatever. But with us, we do everything - I mean even nowadays in the rural areas, whatever they do you'll see that there is some religion in it. It is done with all the respect.<sup>9</sup>

Ngada's critique of western academic research and his advocacy that 'people from the ground' be put into places of authority and given 'a chance to say things the way they know them and the way they understand them, to give their experiences,' lead us to the *third* sense in which this thesis may be said to be 'grounded'. With respect to research methodology, the thesis has employed qualitative, participatory methods of 'data collection' and a grounded approach to theory (Levine *et al* 1994; Marshall and Rossman 1989; Northcott 1991; Strauss and Corbin 1990). With respect to hearing and documenting the discourse and praxis of landless communities the techniques of participant observation, group interviews, in-depth interviews, elite interviews, theological hearings and small-group bible studies were employed. In addition, document analysis (e.g. the *Memorandum* of 25 June, 1993; the *Land Charter* and group reports of the CLC, 12 February, 1994; the Land Claim Application Forms of claimant communities; LandSat photographs of land degradation in the former 'homelands') and the analysis of undocumented texts (e.g. inscriptions on gravestones, the ruins of brick and stone in

<sup>9</sup> First Interview with Archbishop N. H. Ngada and Rev. Kenosi Mofokeng, ASCA Institute, Braamfontein, 20 September, 1994, unpublished, pp.11-12.



the landscape of removed families and communities, creeping desertification and land erosion in 'resettlement' areas) played a significant role in the research.

In a grounded approach, data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship to each other (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 23). We do not begin with a theory (in this case a proposed theology of land restitution) and then set out to prove it; rather, we begin with an area of study, or a phenomenon, in this case the struggle of rural land-less communities to regain their ancestral lands, and allow theoretical (in this case theological and theological-ethical) categories to emerge from the discourse and praxis of community members themselves. In the case of this thesis, the techniques employed were chosen as those best suited to a research project that sought to cover a range of purposes from exploratory, through descriptive to explanatory (Marshall and Rossman 1989: 78). Ongoing contact with the Transvaal Land Restoration Committee (TLRC), principally at monthly meetings of community representatives held in the offices of the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), facilitated the co-ordination of the fieldwork and provided a forum for accountability and the testing of emergent themes and analyses as the research progressed. The formation of friendships and working relationships was deepened through meetings with community representatives on the ground before and after group interviews and theological hearings, attendance at negotiating sessions between TLRC delegations (including community representatives, staff from TRAC and community lawyers) and the Department of Regional and Land Affairs of the previous government (usually at the level of Deputy Minister), participant observation in the 1994 TLRC annual general meeting and in the land returns and celebrations (*mekete*) of the Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla) and the Bakwena ba Mogopa, attendance at the CLC in Bloemfontein, 12-13 February 1994, and follow-up research in the employ of the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights with the Mashilane, Moletete and Setlhare communities of Mpumalanga and Northern Province.

That said, qualitative research may not be embarked upon in a theoretical vacuum. A critical awareness of the related literature and of the state of play with respect to relevant debates in the fields of constitutional and customary law, history and historiography, political economy, anthropology, ecology and theology has been necessary. The literature on the land issue in South Africa is huge and, of necessity, not all disciplines and interests could reasonably be covered. Guiding my choices have been the perspectives and interests, material and representational, of the rural land-less communities whose theological ethics I seek to document. Accordingly, the field research was undertaken with a set of 'guiding hypotheses' derived from the initial work of the SACC and ICT, written sources published and

unpublished, and initial interviews with theologians, staff at relevant NGOs, party-political officials, and leaders of claimant communities. The guiding hypotheses may also be said to derive in a more general way from several years of personal involvement in the religio-cultural and socio-economic and political struggles of black South Africans, dating from 1986.

In particular, the following 'guiding hypotheses' were employed: 1) there are no voiceless players in the struggle for land in South Africa - the myth of 'voicelessness' must be discarded in the effort to establish a bias for hearing local voices; 2) the persistence of a subjacent integrality with respect to the spiritual and the physical in the worldview of rural communities, in spite of a more differentiated and dichotomised surface resulting from three and a half centuries of western presence in South Africa and the violence done to an integral worldview by the experience of forced removal from ancestral land; 3) the importance of conflicting spiritualities and conceptualisations of land for physical struggles for land, and vice versa; 4) the importance of the experiences of suffering and struggle for the historical and biblical hermeneutics of the communities; 5) the importance of African ancestral tradition (grounded primarily at the graves of the ancestors) for local struggles for land and life; 6) the inter-traditionality of African ancestral, biblical and western Christian traditions in local theologies of land restitution; 7) the relevance and primacy (over professional hermeneutics) of the local biblical hermeneutics of dispossessed communities in countering the theo-ganda of the apartheid state, in supporting their struggles for land restoration, and in articulating an inclusive vision of humanity in a shared land; 8) the importance of relationality, orality and narrativity in the communities and their theologising; 9) the importance of the internal critique by rural black women of the patriarchy inherent in African customary law and practice concerning land for the liberative and transformative quality of the struggles of land-less communities; 10) the inter-relatedness of the issues of land ownership, land use and environmental health; and 11) the inter-play between the prophetic and the pragmatic in local strategising. Together with a general recognition, as noted above, of the multivalent significance of land in the lives of rural communities, and a general approach to theology as 'the second step' (EATWOT 1976), that is as 'critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the Word of God' (Gutierrez 1973: 11), these 'hypotheses' served to direct the initial phase of the field work. The field work did not set out to 'prove' them, nor did it employ them as a means of seeking to reduce the degree of indeterminacy which attends qualitative research; rather, they were employed as a means of guiding the exploratory stages of the research.

At this point a note is in order with respect to the 'theological hearings' which were part of the field research.<sup>10</sup> In keeping with an approach that seeks to hear voices 'from the ground,' the goal of the hearings was to document the theological reflections of community members with respect to their lives on the land, their narratives of dispossession from the land, their struggles to regain their land, and, where relevant, their efforts to rebuild their lives on the land following restitution. The methodology of a grounded theology of land restitution may thus been seen to have much in common with the bias and method of liberation theology, which has received a most useful definition from Gregory Baum who identifies it as having two dimensions, the hermeneutical and the practical, both committed to a preferential option for the poor, with the interplay between the two constituting liberation theology as a praxis:

'Liberation theology' names a field of theologies based on what in ecclesiastical language is called 'the preferential option for the poor.' The preferential option includes two commitments: the first is to read society and its texts from the perspective of the poor and powerless; the second, to give public witness of one's solidarity with their historical struggle for emancipation. The option for the poor has therefore two dimensions, one hermeneutical and the other practical. This twofoldness constitutes liberation theology as a "praxis," which is here defined as the interaction between knowledge and action oriented toward human emancipation. While all forms of theology recognise the impact of knowledge on practice, liberation theology is keenly aware that there is also an impact of practice on human consciousness and hence on the reading of social reality and its texts. In matters dealing with ethics and religion, the entry into truth demands an antecedent alternative practice (Baum, in W. Jeanron and J. Rike, eds., 1991: 11).

The interplay between the hermeneutical and practical dimensions of liberation theology has been a constitutive dynamic in the development of black, contextual, prophetic, feminist and womanist theologies in South Africa - not least the interplay between the struggle against apartheid and the 'hermeneutics of (ideological) suspicion.' Moreover, in the post-election (April 1994) South Africa the hermeneutics of suspicion has been conjoined on the ground with what we may call a 'hermeneutics of affirmation,' which has begun to play a key role in the method of local theologising that seeks to be liberative and transformative. This thesis will argue that both suspicion and affirmation, deconstruction and reconstruction, criticality and creativity emerge as necessary and related aspects of the hermeneutical and practical dimensions of a grounded theology of land restitution in the transition period. In this light, the debate in prophetic theological circles in the early 1990s concerning whether or not we should thank liberation theology for a job well done (it helped us know what we were

<sup>10</sup> The term 'theological hearing' was coined in a meeting of the Theology Commission of the Land and Covenant Programme of the SACC, and owes its existence to the astute ear of Professor Duncan Forrester of New College, Edinburgh.

saying 'No!' to) and move on from it to a theology of 'reconstruction' (which will help us know what we want to say 'Yes!' to) may be seen to be one that engages in an unnecessary oppositionality.<sup>11</sup> In a period of transition, wherein the legacy of the old retains power to subvert and obstruct the birth of the new, there is plenty of work for both an eyes-in-the-back-of-the-head hermeneutics of suspicion and a forward-looking hermeneutics of affirmation. Differently put, there is a need to be intentional about the inter-play between prolepsis and praxis in the work of liberation and transformation in the transition period, lest prolepsis be viewed as mere caprice and praxis as without hope.

As the fieldwork progressed, the discourse and praxis of the communities generated their own thematic categories and analytical framework, and, equally important, did so in their own language(s). As a medium of grounded theology, the language in which local discourse is expressed is an inherent and dynamic aspect of that theology, as will be seen in discussions of vocabulary, grammar and syntax throughout the thesis. In this regard, it is necessary to note that all translation (in this case between and among Sotho, Tswana, Pedi, Pulana, Zulu, Xhosa, Nharo, Afrikaans and English) is also interpretation, and that the thesis is thus the product of a process of linguistico-cultural translation and interpretation, beginning in the interviews, hearings and *mekete* themselves and extending through the analytical and writing stages (and, it is hoped, the reading and reflection stages). Further, with respect to the text of the thesis itself, I am painfully aware of the irony that attends the writing of a text which foregrounds the orality of grounded theology, and of the potential for misrepresentation that inheres in the writing of smooth (relatively) prose about the ragged edges of life as lived 'from the underside of history'. There is an inescapable sense in which the medium thus subverts the message, insofar as an academic thesis may be said to have a 'message'. The best one can do at this stage is to signal the problem, and exhort the reader to read with a hermeneutic that is not as square as the shape of the page nor as clean as the lines of the text.

With respect to the ethics of consent in participatory research, permission to quote by name from interviews, hearings, meetings and *mekete*, including prayers at grave sites, in the text of the thesis was secured from the participants in each community. Participants from the member communities of the TLRC were adamant that they be quoted by name, thus answering my concern that the identification of speakers might expose them to possible reprisals on the part of those who continue to resist their struggle for land restitution. Special care was taken in

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Charles Villa-Vincencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, Cambridge, 1992; and Sam Maluleke, 'The Proposal for a Theology of Reconstruction - a critical appraisal,' *Missionalia* 22:3, 1994, 245-258.

the case of women participants, whose critique of the patriarchy of both apartheid and African customary law and practice with respect to land exposed them to potential danger from within as well as without their communities. In most cases the women involved in the research wanted their names associated with their words. As Annie Joseph in Komaggas in the Northern Cape said, 'Yes you may quote us. We have spoken the truth. So, no problem. Maybe some good will come of it.'<sup>12</sup> There were cases, however, like that of the women farmers in the Zoeknag Rice Project, wherein it was not clear that permission to quote by name was unanimous - a lack of clarity that resulted in some names being withheld from the text.

A note on the scope of the thesis is also in order. Land restitution is but one aspect of the wider issue of land reform in South Africa, and refers primarily to the claims of those who belong to communities with ancestral claims to specific lands, or who were evicted from farms as a result of racially discriminatory legislation. In such cases, it is the restitution of land rights, whether registered or unregistered, that is claimed. More broadly, the *Green Paper on South African Land Policy* issued by the Department of Land Affairs in February 1996 identifies three land reform programmes, elaborated in response to the urgent need to 'redress the injustices of apartheid, foster national reconciliation and stability, underpin economic growth and improve household welfare and alleviate poverty.' The three programmes are outlined as follows: 1) *land redistribution* ('to provide the poor with land for residential and productive purposes in order to improve their livelihoods'); 2) *land restitution* ('to restore land and to provide alternate remedies to people dispossessed by racially discriminatory legislation and practice'); and 3) *tenure reform* ('to extend security of tenure to all South Africans under diverse forms of tenure').<sup>13</sup> It may be seen, then, that the thesis, based primarily on the discourse and praxis of member communities of the Back to the Land Campaign, and more specifically of the TLRC, confines itself in the main to the matter of land restitution. While a

<sup>12</sup> Quoted from the Group Interview on Women and Land, Komaggas, Namaqualand, 1 September 1994, unpublished.

<sup>13</sup> The *Green Paper*, released on 1 February 1996, is part of an ongoing policy initiative of the Department of Land Affairs. It builds on the *Framework Document on Land Policy* (circulated in May 1995) and the *Draft Statement of Land Policy and Principle* presented for discussion at the National Land Policy Conference held on 31 August and 1 September 1995. As described by the Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, in his Forward to the *Green Paper*, 'This historic conference was attended by over 1000 South Africans from all corners of our country and all walks of life. The bulk of delegates to the conference consisted of representatives of historically disadvantaged communities, many of them from remote rural areas. All participants voiced strongly-held views as to the correct way forward in regard to land policy. Those formulating the *Green Paper* took into account the views and concerns of the delegates to the conference as well as of other stakeholders in the land reform process.' How successfully the drafters of the *Green Paper* balanced the views and interests of all 'stakeholders' is a matter of ongoing debate (cf. TRAC's *Critique of the Green Paper on Land Reform*, Johannesburg, 1996). The next, and perhaps ultimate, stage in the current policy formation process is to be the publication of a *White Paper on Land Reform*, said to be in an advanced stage of preparation.



grounded theology of land restitution may well be seen to have relevance for land redistribution and tenure reform, it is as well to bear in mind that the primary focus of the thesis is on the theological ethics of communities engaged in the struggle for the restoration of their ancestral lands and of their lives on that land.

The scope and primary focus of the thesis being land restitution, it is useful at this point to quote from the preamble to the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22, 1994):

To provide for the restitution of rights in land in respect of which persons or communities were dispossessed under or for the purpose of furthering the objects of any racially based discriminatory law; to establish a Commission on Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Claims Court; and to provide for matters connected therewith.

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1993 (Act No. 200 of 1993), provides for the restitution of a right in land to a person or community dispossessed under or for the purpose of furthering the objects of any racially based discriminatory law;

AND WHEREAS provision is to be made for measures designed to achieve adequate protection and advancement of persons, groups or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, in order to promote their full and equal enjoyment of rights in land:

NOW THEREFORE BE IT ENACTED by the Parliament of South Africa, as follows: -  
(Minister of Land Affairs, 1994)

The preamble, it will be observed, speaks of the restitution of *rights in land*; rural land-less communities speak of the restitution of the land itself. In the event, the struggles of the member communities of the Back to the Land Campaign are aimed at the restitution of the land of their ancestors, and they are thus resistant to considering alternative land or financial settlements *in lieu* of ancestral land by way of compensation. It is at this point that the relevance of the question concerning the difference between the restitution of land and the restitution of *rights in land* comes to the fore. While rural land-less communities have displayed a critical willingness to negotiate the point, particularly in cases where the feasibility of the restoration of ancestral land is in doubt (e.g. in the case of the Moletete, much of whose ancestral land is now part of the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve, and some of whose graves are under the water of the Blydepoort Dam), they display also a deep attachment to the land of their forefathers and foremothers, and are loath to abandon their dreams and struggles to return to it. As we will see, this question is one which foregrounds the importance of the religio-cultural for the historical-legal and the political in the struggles of rural communities for land restitution. The scope of the thesis is thus restricted to that of *land restitution* as one aspect of the wider concern for land reform, and is so from the perspective of rural land-less communities.

## **B. The Irruption of Rural Land-less Communities**

Moving from a resistance to a restitution footing early in the transition period, rural land-less communities have employed a wide array of organisational, legal, political, diplomatic, media, activist, and religio-cultural strategies in their struggles for the restoration of their ancestral lands. Their physical and discursive irruption into the policy debate on land restitution in the early 1990s countered dramatically the perception that the discourse and praxis of land-less communities was just so much rural marginalia. The launch of the Back to the Land Campaign in 1990, facilitated by the NLC, began to move the centre of the debate closer to the ground, and by 1992-1993 it was influencing the multi-party negotiations process of the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) with respect to the constitutional issues of restitution, compensation and property rights. Further, the irruption has succeeded to some extent in changing our sense of the centre: it has challenged the hegemony of geo-political, judicial, financial and discursive centres of power in South Africa (e.g. Pretoria, Cape Town, Stellenbosch, Bloemfontein, Durban and Johannesburg), calling instead for a multi-centric consciousness beyond national, provincial and academic capitals. In a comparative case, the First Peoples of the Kalahari, when called 'Remote Area Dwellers' by their government in Gaborone, reply, 'Who are the remote area dwellers?! Those who live in Gaborone are remote area dwellers to us!' (Mogwe 1992). There is an enabling sense of local centrality in the irruption, that knows also the importance of networking with other local centres in the campaign to move the national centre of policy and legislative debate closer to the ground. This changing consciousness of 'centre' is a necessary aspect of translating/bridging the distance between 'centres' and 'margins' in the dominant consciousness of the country. It signals the need to break through the culture of centre and margin, and may be seen to promote the 'people-driven' dynamic that the Reconstruction and Development Programme seeks to facilitate.

The Back to the Land Campaign (BLC) began in humble circumstances when eleven rural and land-less communities came together in 1990 to discuss their common struggles for land and to critique the De Klerk government's position concerning land reform. Also in 1990, rural women, who had been slowly organising at the local level since 1986 when TRAC hired Mam Lydia Kompe to begin the work, launched the Rural Women's Movement (RWM 1994; TRAC Annual Report 1994), seeking thereby to unite, organise and empower rural black women in their struggles against the systemic patriarchy of both apartheid and African customary law and practice concerning land ownership and use, and to promote the political and personal rights of women in their communities (RWM 1994).

The first national meeting of the BLC was held in March 1991, at which it was decided by delegates from communities throughout South Africa to launch a nationally co-ordinated campaign to bring pressure on the De Klerk government concerning the right to land restitution. Between March 1991 and August 1993 five national meetings of the BCL were held, extending and strengthening the linkages between and among communities throughout the country and their alliance partners (e.g. NLC, LRC, LAPC, CALS, SACC and SACBC). In 1991 the government published its *White Paper* on land policy, which was immediately critiqued by rural land-less communities and their alliance partners because of its rejection of the right to claim restitution of ancestral lands - a critique which, given the changing political climate of the transition, helped to move the De Klerk government to reconsider its stance on land restitution. In June 1991 the Abolition of Racially Based Land Measures Act was passed in parliament, which repealed the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936 and related racially discriminatory legislation. As we will see below, while the repeal of the Land Acts was welcomed by all, it was a critical acceptance of what was in effect an ambiguous legislative action. Further, De Klerk, in a partial concession to rural land-less communities, created the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA), which, as we will see, was initially rejected by the Back to the Land Campaign as a 'toy telephone' and a delaying mechanism, and then tested practically by thirty-one of the BLC communities. Also in 1991, rural land-less communities in the (former) Transvaal came together to form the Transvaal Land Restoration Committee (TLRC) - a regional co-ordinating body for land restitution and rural development. Further, the NLC was formed from its predecessor, the National Committee Against Removals (NCAR), signalling an agenda that had moved beyond the resistance stage to a more pro-active footing concerning restitution and development.

1992 saw the launch of a national campaign in opposition to the sale and transfer of state land by the De Klerk government, and a campaign calling for a moratorium on the eviction of labour tenants. In May of 1993 the national meeting of the BLC, with 60 communities represented, broadened its base of participation and support, and extended the scope of its concerns to include restitution, redistribution, labour tenants and the issue of compensation. On 25 June 1993 scores of BLC communities demonstrated at the World Trade Centre, seeking to pressurise the constitutional negotiating process. They submitted a *Memorandum* to the multi-party negotiators which argued their case for the restoration of their ancestral lands, the provision of land for evicted labour tenants, recognition of the rights of women to land, the dangers to land restitution inherent in the existing property clause, and the injustice and impracticality of the demand that dispossessed and impoverished rural



communities contribute to market-determined 'compensation' for current land-owners. In its conclusion, the *Memorandum* signalled the resolve of rural land-less communities to re-occupy their land should their demands not be met. As it happened, the BLC demonstration, peaceful and orderly, contrasted sharply with a violent invasion of the World Trade Centre on the same day by the Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB, Afrikaner Resistance Movement), staged to assert the right of the Boerevolk to a Volkstaat.<sup>14</sup> In August 1993 the BLC staged a second demonstration at the World Trade Centre, calling for the scrapping of the property clause in the proposed Bill of Rights - a clause which, as drafted, was seen by the communities to be obstructive of land restitution and redistribution, as we will see below. By the end of 1993 a campaign had been launched for the establishment of a Land Claims Court to replace ACLA, and rural land-less communities throughout the country were meeting at local and regional levels in preparation for a national Community Land Conference to be held early in 1994.

In February 1994, two months before the first democratic elections in South Africa, and in the heat of the campaigns of the parties contesting the election, 800 delegates from more than 350 rural and land-less communities came together in Bloemfontein in the first rural summit in the history of South Africa. The summit, called the Community Land Conference (CLC), met to ratify a common *Land Charter* and to plot a way forward in their struggles for land restitution, political empowerment, and people-oriented development. They voiced their dissatisfaction with the compromises reached on land by the African National Congress and the Nationalist Party during the multi-party negotiations which preceded the elections, rejecting in particular the property clause in the proposed Bill of Rights, which protected the right to private property and allowed for state expropriation of private land only for 'public purposes' (e.g. roads), and not in the broader 'public interest' (e.g. land redistribution). The delegates saw in this compromise a victory for white property owners who, it was thought, would not hesitate to use it to counter the restitution clause in the Interim (1993) Constitution, interpreting it as having secured for current property owners a legal ground upon which to challenge a new government in its efforts to redistribute land following the elections.<sup>15</sup> The delegates were in any case adamant that the restoration of their ancestral lands be effected *before* the April 1994 elections. Their argument ran as follows: since it was the National Party

<sup>14</sup> The events of 25 June 1993 are examined in more detail in chapter two below, under the heading 'The Graves of the Ancestors as a *Locus Theologicus*,' and in chapter four under the heading, '*Lefatse la Bo 'Ntat'a Rona*: The Land of Our Fathers.'

<sup>15</sup> The ANC campaigned on a platform which included the pledge to redistribute 30% of South Africa's agricultural land within five years of the date of the elections, a policy which has since become part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme of the Government of National Unity.

that was responsible for the dispossession, it was incumbent upon the National Party Government to make itself responsible also for the restitution, and not saddle the new government with the task of redressing wrongs perpetrated by the apartheid regime. In response to objections that the time-line was impossibly short for such a quick fix, the communities declared that since it had not taken the government long to dispossess them, it should not take it long to repossess them. The argument was more hortatory than realistic as points were scored in the run-up to the elections. Yet, while most of the communities represented at the CLC were not back on their land by the time of the April 1994 elections, their activism and discourse did exert pressure on the constitutional negotiations following the elections. By the time the final draft of the property clause in the Bill of Rights was presented to the Constitutional Assembly for adoption (May 1996), the right of government to expropriate land had been extended such that government could now expropriate not only for 'public purposes' but also in the broader 'public interest', including an explicit provision for land reform [section 25 (4)]. Not surprisingly, the property clause was the focus of animated public and private interest, and was one of the last issues to be finalised in the feverish endgame to the political negotiations that lay behind the drafting of the text of the 1996 Constitution presented to the Constitutional Assembly for adoption.<sup>16</sup>

Further, the delegates to the CLC rejected 19 June 1913 as the cut-off date for applications for land restitution,<sup>17</sup> demanding that the date be set back to 1652, which marks the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck in Table Bay and the beginning of the long history of the dispossession and impoverishment of Africans by Europeans in what is now South Africa. In effect this objection signalled a militant dissatisfaction with the constitutional principle of land restitution as drafted, and a disdain for the restrictions, seen to be motivated by the material and political interests of white South Africans, that the negotiating process was seen to be

<sup>16</sup> The Constitutional Assembly (CA) adopted the text of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 on 8 May 1996, and submitted it to the Constitutional Court for certification. The Court held hearings during the first two weeks of July, and reached its decision on 6 September 1996. The Court, charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the text of the Constitution conformed to the Constitutional Principles entrenched in the Interim (1993) Constitution, found that it had to send the Constitution back to the CA for review. While the Constitution was in general a great achievement, the Court said, the text in several respects (e.g. various sections dealing with the powers of Provincial and Local Governments) was found not to comply with the Constitutional Principles. Fortunately for land-less communities, the provisions in the property clause of the Bill of Rights concerning expropriation in the public interest, including that of land reform, were not designated by the Court for review. The Court gave the CA three months from 6 September 1996 to review and resubmit the text of the Constitution. Certification is thus expected before the end of 1996.

<sup>17</sup> June 19, 1913, the date of the enactment of the Natives Land Act, is stipulated in the Interim Constitution (1993) [section 121(2)(a)] as the date before which claims for land restitution will not be valid in terms of the restitution programme of the new government. The Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22, 1994) retains this date [section 2 (2) and (3)].

placing upon restitution in general. The delegates were united in their conviction that the constitutional principle of land restitution had been unnecessarily compromised by the 1913 cut-off date. While most politicians and observers in South Africa regarded the 1652 demand as manifestly impracticable, it signalled the resolve of the rural dispossessed to speak with their own voice in their struggles for the restoration of their ancestral land and of the lives of their communities on it. The stand taken by rural land-less communities on the cut-off date may be seen to have influenced the policy formation process of the Department of Land Affairs whose *Green Paper* (1996) advocates that historical claims arising from dispossession prior to 1913 be granted, at the discretion of the Minister, preferential status in land redistribution and development programmes, provided that the claimants are 'disadvantaged and will benefit in a sustainable manner from a land based support programme' (DLA 1996a: section 3.11.3, p.37).

More dramatically, the Community Land Conference marked the arrival centre stage of the power of rural women in South Africa. By far the hottest debates at the CLC related to the demands presented by the Commission on Women and Land, in which black women called not only for the right to own land in their own names, whether married or unmarried, but also for an end to polygamy and to the heritability of widows by the brothers of their deceased husbands. A woman's right to own and work the land should not have to go through a man, they argued, introducing into the debate the spirit and voice of *womandla*, an empowering conflation of 'woman' and *amandla* (Nguni: power).<sup>18</sup> While the male delegates accepted the demand that women be allowed to own land in their own names whether married or unmarried, they rejected vehemently women's demands concerning an end to polygamy and the heritability of widows. This elicited in turn a strong rebuttal from the women delegates, who were present in equal numbers as a result of an prior agreement that each community would send one male and one female delegate to the CLC.<sup>19</sup> Maggie Matlala spoke of the psychological suffering experienced by women who were caught in the domestic politics of a polygamous marriage. 'We have understood how men oppress us women,' she stated. 'When you marry as the first wife you become your husband's mother.' A second woman said, 'Most men practice polygamy forcibly. They don't consult the women.' A third spoke of the economic hardship involved for the family. 'We have problems feeding our children,' she said. 'Our children have

<sup>18</sup> I first saw the word *womandla* on a home-made poster on a wall in the office of Rev Kenosi Mofokeng at the ASCA Institute, Braamfontein. Thereafter, when I used the word in the communities, the response was usually that of laughter: the laughter of women was that of delight, recognition and camaraderie; the laughter of the men was more that of bemusement, derision and at times nervousness.

<sup>19</sup> In this may be seen the growing influence of the Rural Women's Movement in the shaping of the irruption, and the commitment to gender equality on the part of the NLC and its affiliates, who facilitated the CLC.

no clothes.<sup>20</sup> At this women delegates broke out in a thunderous ululation of support. Of the many men who rejected this demand, it was Milton Ncube who put the male case most bluntly. 'Women should know that as Zulus we pay eleven cattle for a wife,' he said. 'That's why a widow should be inherited by the husband's brother.'<sup>21</sup> While progress of a sort was made, in that the right of women to own land was unanimously accepted and is one of the key declarations of the *Land Charter*, it was clear that the struggle of rural women within the larger struggle of the rural dispossessed, an 'irruption within the irruption,'<sup>22</sup> has many challenges ahead of it - the most important and intimate of which will be faced at the local level. Since the April 1994 elections a communications network has been established between the Rural Women's Movement (RWM) and women Members of Parliament, in which women like Lydia Kompe MP and Beauty Mkhize of the RWM play pivotal roles in linking local women's struggles with national resources for empowerment, training and funding.

The *Land Charter* as a whole displays clearly the inclusive and participatory process which allowed men and women to speak for themselves, identifying and debating their own analyses and priorities at local, regional and national levels. Very much their own document, it voices the demands of the rural dispossessed in the following areas: the fundamental need of all people for land on which to live and farm; the restoration of land to communities which were forcibly removed; land rights for farm workers and labour tenants; land rights for women; local government which is democratic and participatory; housing for all; development; and political rights for land-less people in general. Its preamble provides a most articulate and moving statement of the analysis and aspirations of the rural dispossessed:

*We, the marginalised people of South Africa, who are land-less and land hungry, declare our needs for all the world to know.*

*We are the people who have borne the brunt of apartheid, of forced removals from our homes, of poverty in the rural areas, of oppression on the farms and starvation in the bantustans. We have suffered from migrant labour which has caused our family life to collapse. We have starved because of unemployment and low wages.*

*We have seen our children stunted because of little food, no water and no sanitation. We have seen our land dry up and blow away in the wind, because we have been forced into smaller and smaller places.*

*These are the biggest difficulties facing our country in the future.*

*We look forward to the birth of a new South Africa. But for us there will be nothing new until there is land and services and growth. We will not sit back and watch as the wealth builds up in the cities, while on the edges of the cities, in small towns and in the countryside, we continue to suffer and starve.*

<sup>20</sup> Maggie Matlala and others, quoted by Joanne Collinge, 'Women come out fighting - African Feminism,' *Johannesburg Star*, 23 February, 1994, p.17.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>22</sup> The phrase 'irruption within the irruption' is taken from Mercy Amba Oduyoye's work (1983; 1986; 1988) on the struggles and theology of women in Africa.

*These are our demands. We have discussed them in each of our communities, in our regions and as a nation of rural people.*<sup>23</sup>

In a concluding 'Way Forward', the *Land Charter* states the praxis-oriented conviction that 'land-less and rural people must organise or starve,' and signals a preparedness to defy the new government should it prove ineffectual, too moderate or too gradualist in its land reform programme. 'If our demands are not met,' it states, 'we will launch a campaign to occupy vacant land and state land, and return to our land.'<sup>24</sup>

The hard line was maintained in a memorandum presented to Nelson Mandela by community representatives following the Community Land Conference:

We are not happy with the property rights and restitution clauses in the interim constitution. The property rights clause must be scrapped because it makes the expropriation for community purposes too expensive. The property rights clause will make the lives of those who have been dispossessed worse than before. The restitution clause sets the cut-off date for land claims at 1913 which excludes indigenous peoples' land claims. We demand the constitutional right to restitution for all those who have been dispossessed.<sup>25</sup>

In response, Mandela acknowledged, 'Your complaints are valid. One mistake we made was not to consult sufficiently with the grassroots.'<sup>26</sup> He then outlined the various legislative (e.g. the Restitution Act) and developmental (e.g. the President's Projects of the RDP) measures which the ANC was preparing with respect to the plight of rural land-less communities, and highlighted the ANC's election promise to redistribute 30% of South Africa's agricultural land during its first five years in office. The community representatives, while acknowledging Mandela's commitment and support, indicated that their objections had been communicated previously in the form of a memorandum to the negotiators of the Interim Constitution, and remained adamant that their demands be taken seriously.<sup>27</sup>

In contrast with previous stages in South Africa's history of dispossession and resistance, after February 1994 it was only with great difficulty that there could still be said to be voiceless players in the struggle for land restitution. From the launch of the Back to the Land Campaign and the Rural Women's Movement in 1990 to the CLC and its follow-up early in 1994, land-less communities and their organisations had united their voices and struggles for land restitution and rural development in a way which could no longer be ignored by the major

<sup>23</sup> Preamble to the *Land Charter*, adopted by the Community Land Conference, Bloemfontein, 12 February, 1994, and published by the National Land Committee, Braamfontein, 1994.

<sup>24</sup> *Land Charter*, *ibid.*, Section 9.

<sup>25</sup> The CLC Memorandum to Nelson Mandela, in the NLC *Land Update*, No 30, April 1994, p.5.

<sup>26</sup> Nelson Mandela, *ibid.*, p.4.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, pp.4-5.



political and economic powers involved in the national policy debate on land. It was no longer a matter of the 'voiceless masses' needing to find their voice, it was rather a matter of others needing to find ears to listen to that voice, both critically and self-critically, whether in opposition or in solidarity.

The Community Land Conference was itself a model of this change: it was a conference *by* rural people, as opposed to the many conferences held *for* them. Only the delegates themselves had a voice and a vote at the conference. The observers, of whom there were scores, drawn from legal, academic, political, NGO and church-based organisations, were to be present in silence, an injunction which, with one exception, they respected, notwithstanding the strong urge to intervene in the debate on women's rights to land. The delegates communicated through a sophisticated infrasound system of simultaneous translation in Zulu/Xhosa, Sotho/Tswana, Afrikaans and English. The local village *kgotla* (assembly/court - often meeting under the most prominent tree in the village) was thus transformed into a national *sebaka* (assembly) of the rural dispossessed in South Africa, with the important difference that women, denied under customary law and practice, were present in equal numbers with an equal voice and vote.

With the exception of the Peoples' Forums organised by the ANC during its 1994 election campaign, the land debate had, up to the time of the elections, been dominated by an elitist approach on all sides. Political, economic, legal, academic, agricultural, developmental and environmental experts both national and foreign had commanded the process to the extent that it seemed that everyone had been consulted but those most centrally involved: the people who live on the land, who work it, and who, for all of the negotiations, remained unconvinced that their needs were being met and their rights and interests protected. In the political sphere, while the repeal of the Land Acts in 1991 and the drafting of an Interim Constitution in 1993 were hailed from above as great victories on the road to a new South Africa, from below all of the human questions concerning the legacy of apartheid among the dispossessed remained: rural communities were still land-less and poverty-stricken. Speaking one month before the multi-party negotiators agreed on the inclusion in the Interim Constitution of a Constitutional Principle on the right to restitution of those who were dispossessed as a result of racially discriminatory legislation and practice, Cyril Ramaphosa, then Secretary-General of the ANC, confessed that, 'The land question appears so difficult, so laden with emotion, so ridden with layers of competing interests, that we always wait for a more convenient moment to deal with it ...The starting point is found in

restoring rights to those forcibly removed from their land under apartheid laws. But we also need to address problems of poverty, malnutrition and unemployment through land reform.<sup>28</sup>

In the economic sphere, market-based approaches to rural land reform such as that of the World Bank, had been seen by the dispossessed as both unjust and inaccessible. A market-based approach was seen to favour those who were currently in possession of the land, allowing them to nullify its 'willing buyer/willing seller' premise by refusing to participate in the first place, unless faced with government expropriation, concerning which the communities had further objections (e.g. 'it will cost too much') as we have already seen above. Indicative of their suspicion of market values, land-less communities felt that a market-based approach to restitution and redistribution misread the question of compensation. Compensation, they said, should be paid *to* them by their dispossessors in recompense for losses sustained during and as a result of forced removal and relocation, and *not by* them, or by the state on their behalf, to their dispossessors in payment for land from which they had been dispossessed. As Aninka Claassens has noted in her critique of the World Bank's 1994 Rural Restructuring Programme for South Africa, in many cases compensation paid to white farmers, already the beneficiaries of substantial state subsidies to settle on and farm land forcibly expropriated from blacks, would amount to a double reward for supporting apartheid. Strengthening her critique is the opportunistic price loading of land on the part of current land-owners in a climate of state acquisition of private land for the purpose of redistribution. Land evaluation in such a context becomes as interested a science as can be imagined. Having spent more than a decade fighting in solidarity with communities like the Bakwena ba Mogopa, Claassens argues, 'Processes which reinforce market-based ideology are taking away the space people have won on the ground through local struggle and incredible suffering.'<sup>29</sup>

One of the few rurally-based black participants at the conference called to consider the World Bank proposals stated, 'This programme aims at the survival of the fittest. What about the land-less poor?!'<sup>30</sup> It was not accidental that this criticism was voiced by a woman: the World Bank's programme allowed that poor, female-headed rural households be given access only to housing sites; those who wanted to farm would have to put up their own money before they could secure a matching grant from the South African government. Given that the typical South African farmer is said to be 'a woman with a baby on her back,'<sup>31</sup> this stricture was seen

<sup>28</sup> Cyril Ramaphosa, in *New Ground*, 14, 1994, p.16.

<sup>29</sup> Aninka Claassens, in *New Ground*, 14, 1994, p.17.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.17.

<sup>31</sup> This statement is a central assertion of the Rural Women's Movement.

by many as being both unjust and counter-productive - the productivity of the land being a concern, however differently motivated, of all. A year earlier, in their memorandum presented to the multi-party negotiators at the World Trade Centre on 25 June 1993, rural communities from all over South Africa had declared, 'It is not enough to say that we can now buy land. Apartheid has left most of our people impoverished, and we need to be given assistance as the white farmers have been given assistance for so many years.'<sup>32</sup>

These criticisms, however, should not be taken as evidence that rural land-less communities had closed the door on participating in government and private-sector processes with respect to land restitution. Their strategy has been one of critical engagement with power, while holding open the option of direct re-occupations of ancestral land currently in the hands of the state. One of the clearest examples of this strategy came with the critical participation of some of the Back to the Land communities in the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA), which was established under duress by F.W. De Klerk following his repeal of the Land Acts in 1991. Land-less communities, their lawyers and alliance partners had denounced the ACLA for being unrepresentative (De Klerk had appointed its members), toothless (it had advisory powers only), circumscribed in its mandate (most communities were not eligible to apply to it for land restoration), and obstructionist (it was tied to the old apartheid bureaucracy). Indeed, the repeal of the Land Acts itself had met with a similar response: it was welcomed as a step in the right direction, but was heavily criticised both because it rejected any notion of land restoration for communities which had been dispossessed under the Land Acts, and because the legislation which accompanied the repeal sought to ensure that the legacy of the Land Acts would remain intact. Having registered these criticisms, however, thirty-one communities, mainly those holding title deeds to their land, for example the Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla), then proceeded in 1992 to test the efficacy of the ACLA, whose provisions made it possible for communities which had lost registered rights in land to at least apply for restitution. This reversal of their previous decision to dismiss the ACLA on principle, a reversal which caught their alliance partners by surprise, was made as part of a larger strategic decision to 'exploit all avenues' in the struggle to regain their land. In all, what Cornel West has called 'prophetic pragmatism' (West 1989) is as apt a characterisation of the strategy of rural land-less communities as one is likely to find.

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<sup>32</sup> Back to the Land Communities, *Memorandum to the Multi-Party Negotiators*, 25 June, 1993.



The case of the Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla), which resulted in the first legal land restoration in the country, is instructive in several respects.<sup>33</sup> On 1 March 1994 the Bakubung began to return to their land near Boons in the maize belt in the Western Transvaal, following 25 years in internal exile in an arid resettlement area called Ledig, near Sun City in the former Bophuthatswana. They had lived on their ancestral land at Molotestad since the early 1800s, and had purchased it, at great cost to each member family, in 1884. The title deeds were finalised in the late 1880s, and additional land had been purchased and duly registered in 1911 and 1949. In 1965 the Native Commissioner for Rustenburg informed the Bakubung that they were to be removed to Ledig, and the following year their land was declared a 'black spot' under apartheid legislation and their community razed to the ground. In 1967 their land was expropriated by the state, and Bakubung who had chosen to resist the removal were arrested and charged with illegally occupying state land. In the meanwhile a Bakubung chieftainess, Catherine Monnakgotla, had led a 'voluntary' removal of some of the Bakubung (mainly tenants, with a few member families) to Ledig in 1966. Many of the Bakubung ba Ratheo had remained on their land, however, in defiance of the government action. The leaders of the resistance, including the present Chief, Arthur Lebusa Monnakgotla, were detained, and some, like George Monnakgotla, were tortured under the Terrorism Act early in 1969. In a final act of dispossession, the remnant of the Bakubung resistance was violently removed from Molotestad while their leaders were in prison.

Once in Ledig the community suffered further land loss: of the four farms originally designated for Bakubung resettlement only two were made available in the end. Some of the land provided for the resettlement of the Bakubung was appropriated by the government of Bophuthatswana for the creation of the Pilansburg Nature Reserve. Moreover, an expensive resort bordering on the Nature Reserve took as its name 'The Bakubung Lodge,' thus misrepresenting its location with painful errancy as being the ancestral home of the Bakubung - 'The People of the Hippo' as they 'colourfully' proclaimed them to be. In a glossy brochure, featuring attractive white bodies posed in exotic settings, the Bakubung Lodge promoted its peaceful therapeutic value for 'harried' (white) city dwellers.

If this were not enough, a further section of the Bakubung's resettlement area was sold to the owner of Sun City to be developed into a golf course for the Lost City complex. In the event, many black communities were forcibly removed from their ancestral land to make way

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<sup>33</sup> This account of the case of the Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla) is conflated from various numbers of the *TRAC Newsletter* dating from 1990 to 1994, interviews with leaders and members of the Bakubung community in March and May of 1994, and from personal observations made during a field trip to Ledig and the Pilansberg Nature Reserve in 1994.

for nature reserves and/or game parks (e.g. the Moletele and Mashilane) as part of an elitist white approach to conservation that rural land-less communities interpreted as 'putting animals ahead of people,' prompting from Albie Sachs the useful question, 'Do you have to be white to be green?'<sup>34</sup>

The case of the Bakubung may thus be seen to betray more than most the hallmarks of forced removal under apartheid (divide-and-rule tactics employed by the National Party government, the violent enforcement of racially discriminatory laws, disdain for legally registered black title deeds, and the dispossessive pursuit of white conservation practices and tourism interests). It was thus a claim that ACLA could not refuse, nor the government obstruct once the ACLA had advised then president De Klerk of its decision. Moreover, the election was but two months away and the Bakubung had played the election card to good advantage, declaring with other member communities of the TLRC that land restitution was the responsibility of the old government, under which they had been dispossessed, and not that of the new. In the case of the Bakubung the strategy worked.

The challenge since their return to Molotestad has been to know how to play the post-election card, in response to the staggering developmental needs associated with restoring their community on the land. The community returned to find no infrastructure at Molotestad. All that remained of their village, destroyed in 1966, was the graveyard and two bore-holes located on the grounds of the old Lutheran Mission. Given the proximity of the elections, the community's expectations of immediate development assistance were high. Half a year later, however, there were still no permanent structures and little in the way of infrastructure. Consistent with its strategy of critical engagement with government coupled with local initiatives on the ground, the Bakubung embarked on a development plan of their own for their land. Enlisting the help of organisations like TRAC, the Land Use Unit of the Environmental and Development Agency, the Independent Development Trust and the Mavula Trust, the community began to formulate a plan that included provision for water, housing, roads, schools, and agriculture, using community mapping techniques to identify and prioritise their most important development needs. In the period following the April 1994 election, various government departments were drawn into the planning process: the Department of Agriculture, and, somewhat anachronistically, the Community Service Division of the old Potchefstroom Regional Office of the Transvaal Provincial Administration. By the end of 1994, however, it had not yet become clear to what extent government would be responsible for funding the

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<sup>34</sup> Albie Sachs, *Protecting Human Rights in a New South Africa*, Oxford, 1990, p.139.

implementation of the development plan once it was finalised. The role of the new government's Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), particularly with respect to communities re-occupying their land, had yet to be clarified, and the procedures for local access to the resources of the RDP had yet to be established.

The publication in September 1994 of the Government of National Unity's *White Paper on Reconstruction and Development* indicated a strong commitment to the internal transformation of government ministries, agencies and bureaucracy to enable them to serve effectively the goals of the RDP. The bureaucracy, which alone consumes fully 60% of the fiscus in South Africa, is proving to be a daunting challenge. At a 1994 consultation of the South African Council of Churches, called to address the churches' role in the RDP, one woman staffer from the ministry then responsible for the RDP characterised the bureaucracy as being dominated by 'reactionary male Afrikaners of a certain age'.<sup>35</sup> The *White Paper*, admitting the 'bottleneck', addressed the question of rural development as follows:

As described elsewhere in this document, the Government will formulate an integrated and sustainable rural development policy in consultation with rural people, their organisations and stakeholders. In particular, attention will be given to broaden access to services and support to small-scale agricultural producers by ensuring access to land, appropriate markets, credit facilities, training and support.

The capacity to implement development programmes in rural areas is a serious bottleneck, which will be addressed as a priority [section 7.7.2].

The RDP has great potential to uproot poverty, empower and enable the poor, and raise the quality of life for many South Africans; at the same time it has the potential, given its limited resources and the tenacious apartheid legacy of poverty on the land, to become a repressive myth, a utopian icon, leading to frustrated expectations and social unrest. The irruption of the rural dispossessed may thus be seen to be indispensable to the success of the RDP - a point all but acknowledged by the RDP in its discourse concerning the need for the RDP to be 'people driven'.

In the post-1994 stage of the transition, the irruption of the rural dispossessed may thus be said to be facing two major challenges: the challenge of land provision for those who continue to be land-less, and the challenge to restore and develop the lives of those who regain their land or who are awarded alternative land. Within these challenges lies a third: the challenge to establish and maintain strong and constructive democratic structures, participatory and gender-inclusive, within the communities. In short, struggles black, white and

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<sup>35</sup> Tanya Lamola, in a speech delivered to the SACC RDP Consultation, Bryanston, September 28, 1994.

green, male and female, local and national, continue with respect to land ownership, use and environmental health. In contrast to a commandist mode of working out solutions to these challenges from above, however, it has become clear that no programme of government or of the private sector can succeed which does not recognise and respect the centrality of the experience, analysis and initiative of the dispossessed themselves in the restitution and development process.

### C. Of Grammar and Theology in a Context of Transition

It is both the virtue and the limitation of a time of transition that it occurs in the subjunctive mood. While the *is* of the indicative in its quotidian thatness and the *must be* of the imperative in its command, request and exhortation are by no means absent, it is the *might be* of the subjunctive, the mixed blessing of potentiality and contingency, that most marks the mood of transition. Indeed, one of the more useful ways of monitoring the progress of transition from the old to the new may be to monitor the transition from the subjunctive to the indicative, through the imperative, in its grammar. With respect to voice, it is the reflexive and reciprocal quality of the middle voice that seems most aptly to characterise transition as a verb. More specifically, the voice of transition may be seen as a middle deponent: that is, middle in form but active, indeed interactive, in sense. As for tense, we are dealing with past, present and future in a complex dynamic that values time both as *khronos* and *kairos*.<sup>36</sup> The sense of substantive as verb (e.g. transition, transformation, restitution, reconstruction, development, empowerment, or sustainability) marks the transition insofar as it is worthy of the name: a movement from the old to the new, employing suspicion and affirmation, criticality and creativity, pointed in the direction of the political, economic and cultural liberation and transformation of the country as a whole, with a preferential option for those who have been dispossessed, disenfranchised and disabled under apartheid and its settler and colonial precursors.

It may be objected, however, that to speak of South Africa in transition as a verb, a part of speech, is to trap it in a line of text - that such a linear approach is too 'thin', even if

<sup>36</sup> There is a sense in which, following the publication of the *Kairos Document* (1985, 1986) and its successors (e.g. *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*, 1989; *Kairos '95: At the Threshold of Jubilee*, 1995), searching for the signs of the times has become part of the social hermeneutic of the transition. Given the many plausible proposals for a 'new *kairos*' since 1986 (e.g. violence as the new *kairos*, proposed by the ICT in a tract in 1989; or transformation as today's *kairos*, proposed by Russel Bothman in his PhD thesis in 1994), it is clear that something akin to *kairos*-spotting has entered into the way we analyse the transition and what God is doing therein. One is at times tempted to ask the question: how far can you stretch a *kairos*? To which the answer may well be: until it becomes part of the hermeneutic; or, until it becomes part of the social ethic; or both.



curvilinear, for the multi-dimensional reality in question. A 'thicker' description (Geertz 1973; 1983; Biersack 1989), a more dynamic metaphor, or a symbol system beyond metaphor is necessary, it may be argued. If this criticism is allowed, the transition may be seen as calling for a more liquid, supple or agile grammar and a more multimedia literacy. Indicative of the need for such a literacy is the increasingly high level of visibility enjoyed by mixed-media artworks throughout South Africa. From the rocks, paint, photographs, trees, flowers and rubber of the township peace parks of the 1970s to displays of the work of university art students in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. University of the Witwatersrand student exhibitions at the Market Theatre, Johannesburg), to formal and informal galleries exhibiting the works of mixed-media artists like Willie Bester (who uses wood, tin, paper, newspaper, paint, plastic, photographs, string, sand and rocks in his collages of scenes in-the-indicative from 'squatter camps' like Crossroads in the Cape), to the homes and cafés of those whom this art touches and to whom it speaks, mixed-media visual art is heralding a multimedia transition. While collage and montage have emerged as the preferred art-forms of the post-modern, wherein collage is used in a variety of disciplines (e.g. architecture) in a verbal sense as a 'collision and superimposition of different ontological worlds' (Harvey 1989:49), there is a sense in which the shacks of the homeless may themselves be seen as a collage of necessity, wherein poverty, incidental resources and the ingenuity of survival in the face of removal and relocation is a mixed-media conjunction of medium and message in the transition.

We are beyond grammar in the transition, or at least beyond what a formal grammar is capable of handling in terms of the plurivocal and multivalent media being employed. At the same time, without a sense of the need for a grammar of transition we will be unable to find a common language in which to hear each other. Indeed, the notion of a grammar of transition may itself be seen to presuppose as much as call for a *lingua franca*; and we must ask if the emerging *lingua franca*, increasingly English-based, is facilitating or frustrating the emancipation and empowerment of the poor at which the transition aims. Questions of linguistics aside, the dominant language of the market, able to commodify even grammar and collage, must be prevailed upon to listen to the language of those who prefer the older relational wisdom of *ubuntu-botho* (see below). In this sense, there is a subjunctivity about grammar itself in the transition: a multimedia literacy is simultaneously possible, contingent and necessary.

The question of a grammar of and in transition raises the question of the grammar of theology in the transition. The importance of orality and narrativity in a grounded approach facilitates a fluid and indigenous expression of the dynamism of the transition, and witnesses to

the overwhelming importance of relationality in the theology and theological ethics of communities on the ground. The growing recognition of the importance of narrative for theology and ethics (Crites 1971; Forrester 1989; Hauerwas 1977, 1983; MacIntyre 1981, 1988; Mazamisa 1995; McCaughey 1993; McClendon 1986; Song 1984) is an essential aspect of the theoretical world of this thesis. Critiquing a deductive approach in ethics (from principle to application), Duncan Forrester argues instead for the primary importance of the indicative in ethics:

In a real sense, then, it is telling the story with all its inner vitality and depth of meaning which is the truest Christian contribution to the public realm. From this point of view the attempt to distil from the story Christian principles, so that Christianity may thus, and only thus, have a bearing on the situation is misleading ... It is the story rather than the principle which helps us to interpret the signs of the times and find their meaning. It is the story which gives guidance (Forrester 1989: 28-29).

Turning his attention to the question: 'But how can story shape policy?', Forrester draws on the work of Karen Lebacqz and Alisdair MacIntyre. Lebacqz's biblical work on justice and the history of the people of Israel suggests that justice flows from story and is grounded in remembrance (Lebacqz in Forrester 1989: 29). In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Alisdair MacIntyre argues that it is precisely the cutting of traditional links between narrative and understandings of justice and rationality that is at the root of the present crisis in ethics (Forrester 1989: 30; MacIntyre 1988: 349-69). A decade earlier the theological work of Stanley Hauerwas was already moving 'from system to story': to an alternative pattern for rationality in Christian ethics which emphasises narrative and community (Hauerwas 1977: 15ff.).

The *memoria passionis* of communities which suffered forced removal and a life of poverty and division in internal exile in the 'dumping grounds' of apartheid, and its linkages with the Christian story understood as the subversive and redemptive *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis Jesu Christi* (Metz 1980), is a compelling example of the importance of narrative in a grounded approach to a theology of land restitution. As we will see below, oral histories *ex memoria passionis* (Metz 1980; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983) are indeed a powerful medium of local theological ethics. Further, the indicative in local narrative ethics may be seen to challenge the subjunctivity of the transition period, articulating a grounding of the transition in the experience of rural land-less communities.



#### D. Toward a Grounded Theology of Land Restitution

What, then, does a grounded theology of land restitution look like? How do rural land-less communities articulate and manifest the faith that has been and continues to be an inherent aspect of their struggles for land? What are the relative influences of African ancestral tradition and Christianity in their theological reflections? Can we speak of an ancestral hermeneutic that is at once African and Black, conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses in a theology that is both in(ter)cultural and liberative? How is the land itself viewed and what role does it play in a grounded theology? What role does relationality play in local hermeneutics and theologising with respect to the community of land, people (inclusive of past, present and future generations) and God? What is the role and influence of African Indigenous Churches in the land struggles of rural black communities? What is the relation between orality, narrativity and textuality in local theologising? To what extent have the theological and ethical reflections of rural black women on their struggles for land rights influenced the land struggles of their communities as a whole? What does a womanist *hermeneutics* with respect to rural women's interpretations of social and biblical texts look like? With respect to biblical hermeneutics, do local interpreters read/hear the text itself, behind the text, or in front of the text (G. West 1991)? What are the linkages between biblical interpretation and practical action in local struggles for ancestral land? What is the interaction between the prophetic and the pragmatic in the strategising of the communities? What are the implications of a grounded theology of land restitution for wider questions of land reform and rural development, for the disciplines of biblical hermeneutics and theological ethics, and for the praxis of the churches with respect to land?

These questions, of specific merit in themselves, serve also to indicate in a more general way the importance of the *quaerens* of theology in a grounded approach - wherein it is the verb (active indicative) in Anselm's classic formulation *fides quaerens intellectum* that receives the primary attention. In the text of the thesis this sense of *quaerens* is indicated by the use of 'Q' to designate the questions and observations of the researcher in excerpts taken from the interviews.

Chapter one discusses the hermeneutical context of a grounded theology of land restitution in a changing South Africa. Presenting hermeneutics as a terrain of struggle, involving contested conceptualisations and spiritualities of land, it argues the case for the primary importance of relationality in a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution, and establishes the multivalent integrality of ancestral hermeneutics in particular. Chapter two begins the documentation and analysis of the discourse and praxis of rural land-less

communities that forms the burden of the thesis. In chapter two an ancestral hermeneutics is employed with respect to the spiritual and strategic significance of the graves of the ancestors in local struggles for land restitution, wherein the graves are read as poly-significative texts against the texts on paper of registered title deeds. A grounded reading of the paradigmatic and programmatic statement of the BLC, 'The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return. *Mayibuye!*' presents the graves as a nexus of the religio-cultural, historical-legal and strategic in the representational and physical struggles of the communities for land. Chapter three explores the linkage between *borapedi* (holistic piety) and praxis in grounded struggles for ancestral land, including the intimate relationship between the ancestors, land and life; the theological-ethical linkages between *toka*, *khotso*, *pula le nala* (justice, peace, rain and prosperity); and the relationship between prayer and praxis in the restitution struggles of the Bakwena ba Mogopa and the Bakubung ba Ratheo. Chapter four documents a grounded discourse on the conflict of patriarchies (*Lefatse la Bo 'Ntat'a Rona* versus *Die Vaderland*) in local struggles for ancestral land, including a critique of false fathers, both European and African, and false trust in the history of dispossession. The prophetic pragmatism of rural land-less communities is documented in the form of a critically inclusive vision of land and people that moves beyond the conflict of patriarchies, subverting the divisive and impoverishing legacies of apartheid on the land and seeking to reverse the downward spiral of land-lessness, poverty and death. The chapter also signals the move beyond patriarchy itself in the hermeneutics and praxis of *womandla*, discussed in detail in chapter seven. Chapters five and six explore the biblical hermeneutics of rural land-less communities engaged in struggles for their ancestral land. Chapter five begins with a critical analysis of the historical and interpretive crises facing any consideration of the bible and land in South Africa, discusses the partial convergence of liberation and transformation traditions (Black, African, Prophetic and Womanist) in local biblical hermeneutics of land restitution, and presents introductory cases wherein participatory relationality is revealed to be the primary dynamic in a grounded biblical hermeneutics. The relational hermeneutics pathways of shared suffering, struggle and celebration are seen to facilitate an inter-community engagement back and forth across the text/interpreter distanciation in which orality and narrativity play key roles. Chapter six documents in detail the biblical hermeneutics of three communities: the Moletete, Dinkwanyane and Leroro, focusing in particular on their employment of suspicion and affirmation in a relational and liberative hermeneutics of restitution. Chapter seven documents the transformative social and biblical hermeneutics and praxis of *womandla*! The struggle of rural women against the dual patriarchies of apartheid and customary law and practice is

documented in the voices of rural women, who struggle not only for equal land rights but also for a transformed humanity, involving in the event the healing of the community of male and female on the land, and a respect for the earth as mother, birthing and nurturing sons and daughters of the soil in an umbilical relationship of belonging and reciprocity. Chapter eight discusses the implications of the thesis for a grounded praxis of *mayibuye iAfrika* in the areas of land restitution claims (exploring the linkage between rights and relationality in the paradigmatic case of the Batlounge ba Putfontein), the internal challenges facing communities as they return to their land, the discipline of theological ethics and the praxis of the church with respect to struggles for land, including its own.

## CHAPTER 1

### **Grounded Hermeneutics in a Context of Transition**

Land relates to the ancestors. To appreciate this we need an ancestral hermeneutics concerning land. Land is the blanket which covers the ancestors. When you take away someone's land, you take away the blanket which covers their ancestors. This is not always articulated in political discourse, but it is very important, central, in peoples' lives on the land and in their struggles for it.

Weli Mazamisa<sup>1</sup>

Every child in this land has a birthright. The umbilical cord between children and mother earth tells them where they come from, where they belong.

Joe Seremane, Chief Land Claims Commissioner<sup>2</sup>

How does a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution express itself? Who are its practitioners, what are their interpretations, how do they make them and how do they voice them? What is the scope of their hermeneutics and how penetrating is their analysis? What does it have in common with published Black, African, Prophetic and/or Feminist and Womanist hermeneutics? What is different and how does it differ? What does it have to teach us? What role does the land itself play in the being and hermeneutics of the communities? This chapter presents an analysis of the wider hermeneutical context in which we will later consider the grounded hermeneutics of land restitution of rural land-less communities. Given the broad compass of the land issue in South Africa, and the multivalent integrality of what we may call a Black African hermeneutics on the ground, the hermeneutical context is approached in an inter-disciplinary way that comprehends interpretive debates and crises in historical, legal, cultural, economic, political, psychological, gender, literary and biblical hermeneutics. Further, given that the context is one of transition, we must consider the way(s) in which hermeneutics are and are not changing, and the convergences and divergences in hermeneutical direction that may be discerned in the wider context and on the ground. Following a preliminary consideration of the question of a hermeneutical starting point, we will consider hermeneutics

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<sup>1</sup> Weli Mazamisa, in a speech launching the first two volumes of the Relevant Church Series of the Western Province Council of Churches, University of the Western Cape, 22 April 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Joe Seremane, in *Celebrating the Land*, DLA Calendar for 1996, Pretoria, March.

as a terrain of struggle in general, and then move to a more specific treatment of grounded hermeneutics in local land struggles.

### **1.1 Preliminary Considerations: Where to Begin is with Whom**

While land and people are intimately and reciprocally related, and the struggle of land-less communities for ancestral land is an inherent aspect of the identity of the communities, a choice must be made with respect to where a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution may be seen to begin. It is the argument of this thesis that a grounded hermeneutics begins not with the struggle of the communities for ancestral land, integrally important as that is, but with the people themselves, seeing their struggles for land as an inherent part of their being before we see their being as an inherent part of their struggle for land. This is not to dichotomise the two; it is, however, to make a necessary distinction between the people and their struggles for land, and to recognise that the hermeneutics practised by the members of rural land-less communities begins with the interpreters themselves. That is, it begins with the 'hermeneutical who,' wherein the interpreters ask the question: who are we?, and ask other questions in light of this question. Grounded hermeneutics begins with faces and names, families and communities, autobiographies and social biographies: it is male and female, young and old, ancestral and yet to be born. The people are - individually and in community, in the first person singular and plural - before their analysis is. Their hermeneutics are intimately related to who they are. It is not that grounded hermeneutics is not socio-economically and politically critical; it is that its relationality is prior, if only by a heart-beat, to its criticality. In other words, the question 'Where to begin?' becomes, in a grounded hermeneutics, 'With whom to begin?'

This distinction may be challenged on the grounds that it is insufficiently critical with respect to ideological suspicion. The challenge is a useful one, and it is not only acknowledged but asserted that a grounded hermeneutics must be a critical hermeneutics: a critical reading of the socio-economic and political locations, interests and commitments of both interpreters and that which is interpreted is essential for the liberative and transformative potentialities of a grounded hermeneutics to be realised. It would be easier, of course, to argue that relationality and criticality are reciprocally related in grounded hermeneutics, as they are, and let it go at that. To choose such an option, however, would be to avoid the challenge and contribution of the hermeneutics of land restitution of the TLRC communities, wherein both suspicion and affirmation, deconstruction and reconstruction, are employed by people for whom

hermeneutics has become an inherent aspect of survival, and thus for whom what works, the pragmatics of resistance and restitution struggles, is never far from the hermeneutic.

## 1.2 Hermeneutics as a Terrain of Struggle

### 1.2.1 Of Theology and Theodolites: Contested Conceptualisations and Spiritualities of Land

The land itself is experienced and understood in personal and relational terms on the ground. The ancestors are buried in it, for example, and sons and daughters are said to be of it, requiring a hermeneutics of land which has learned to focus on subjacent as well as surface texts, with an appreciation of the relationality involved with respect to the land and its people. Land is not only a site of historical and political struggle, of economic interest and agricultural/agri-business endeavour, or of developmental and environmental concern, it is a site of dynamic religious tradition and spiritual strength - a *locus theologicus*, requiring a hermeneutic that employs in an integrated fashion religio-cultural, historical-legal, social-biographical, socio-economic and political analyses. While the question of land ownership, conceived in Western terms as the land belonging to people, is a dominant consideration in the land debates on the way to a new South Africa, the converse, the question of people belonging to the land, continues also to be a major factor in struggles for land, particularly in rural land-less communities. As we will see below, for rural South Africans and for urban dwellers who maintain their ties with their rural roots the matter of belonging to the land, of being a son or daughter of the soil, is an enduring aspect of their being, and thus of their struggles for land restitution in spite of the insidious and ongoing influence of a Western commodificatory conceptualisation of land. The epithet 'a son/daughter of the soil,' in which soil functions as a metonym for Africa and the identification as a recognition of belonging,<sup>3</sup> signals the intimacy of relation between people and land in the consciousness of South Africans.<sup>4</sup> It may be

<sup>3</sup>Robert Sobukwe, for example, in his Final Instructions to members of the Pan-Africanist Congress on 20 March, 1960, the day before the Sharpeville massacre, began as follows: 'Sons and daughters of the soil, Remember Africa! Very soon now we shall be launching. The step we are taking is historical, pregnant with untold possibilities. We must therefore appreciate our role ... our responsibility. The African people have entrusted their whole future to us. And we have sworn that we are leading them, not to death, but to life abundant' (in Pogrund, 1990:126). Archbishop Desmond Tutu, addressing the funeral of Chris Hani in 1993, declared: 'We have come to bury a great son of the soil ... Is there anyone here who doubts that Chris was a great son of the soil? ("No!")' (Tutu 1994: 245). See also Nelson Mandela's reference to F.W. de Klerk as a 'son of the soil' in his inaugural speech as State President on 10 May, 1994 - a reference which elicited no little discussion. As will be noted below, to see the people of Africa as sons and daughters of the soil is to see the earth as mother, of whom the sons and daughters are born.

<sup>4</sup>The same intimacy of relation between people and land may be seen in the spirituality of First Peoples throughout the world. The title of a recent theological study of the land issue in Australia, for example, is entitled: *I Am the Land: Towards a Contemporary Land Theology* (Habel, 1994). And see discussion below.



asserted, then, that *any question about the land is immediately also a question about its people, and as such is relational in its dynamic and multivalent in its signification* - a point which takes us back to the 'hermeneutical who', to be pursued in the following section of the chapter.

Struggles for the land are simultaneously struggles for the land as substance and for the land as signified lived tradition. Following Brueggemann, we may say that in the discourse and praxis of communities struggling to regain their ancestral lands - in their narrative, ritual, drama, poetry, prayer, song, analysis, strategising, negotiations and land returns - 'land' is both denotative and connotative, both actual earthly soil and that soil as it lives in the signified world of its people. 'Land' in both biblical and contemporary narrative, says Brueggemann, 'continually moves back and forth between literal and symbolic intentions,' requiring a hermeneutic which listens for both at the same time:

A *symbolic* sense of the term affirms that land is never simply physical dirt but is always physical dirt freighted with social meanings derived from historical experience. A *literal* sense of the term will protect us from excessive spiritualisation, so that we recognise that the yearning for land is always a serious historical enterprise concerned with historical power and belonging ... Land is always fully historical but always bearer of overpluses of meaning known only to those who lose and yearn for it (1977: 2-3).

Of course, the 'symbolic' sense of the land is as much a site of struggle as the 'literal', and the two are reciprocally related. Representational questions concerning land are both formed by and formative for questions of ownership and use: conflicting conceptualisations and spiritualities of land point to divergent forms of land ownership and tenure, and divergent forms of ownership and tenure point to a conflict of conceptualisations and spiritualities of land. Spike Milligan, for example, in his facetious *The Bible: The Old Testament According to Spike Milligan*, presents the story of the creation of the land as follows:

And God said, Let the waters be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear, and in London it went on the market at six hundred pounds a square foot.<sup>5</sup>

Milligan's construction, moving from creation to commodification with a short sharp shock, jolts us into a recognition of the implications of contending conceptualisations and spiritualities of land for questions of ownership and use. Contrast his reading of the landed interests of the City of London with the following excerpt from a letter of Mrs Dobs Mfeka to the editor of the *Weekly Mail* in Johannesburg:

Land is the gift of God to the people ... all land. It is not like a house. A house is made of

<sup>5</sup> 'Genesis 1:7,' in Spike Milligan, *The Bible: The Old Testament According to Spike Milligan*, London, 1993, p.1. It is worth noting with respect to the importance of socio-economic location for hermeneutics that Milligan's Chapter One bears the sub-title: 'The Creation According to the Trade Unions.'

man's things. Land is not for sale. It is like air. I would not pay shillings for it. The land is my blanket. I wear it like my ancestors ... let me tell you how my ancestors wore the land and how the blanket was taken from them as it was taken from me. Land belongs to the black people who were living here long before the settlers came.<sup>6</sup>

Mrs Mfeka's identification of land as gift, from God to people, may be recognised as a central aspect of both biblical and traditional spirituality and praxis concerning land. At the same time, her foregrounding of the ancestors and her metaphor of land as a blanket worn by the ancestors also features regularly in the speeches of black South Africans concerning their relation to the land. Her theology of land makes linkages between and among God, the land, people and the ancestors in a participative relationality which is sharply critical of a land-as-saleable-commodity conceptualisation and practice. Her socio-economic analysis of dispossession is stated in intimately personal terms: the seizure of African land by white settlers was a seizure of the blanket worn by her ancestors and herself. Her historical claim, 'The land belongs to the black people who were living here long before the settlers came,' thus may be seen to employ a hermeneutics that is both relational and critical.

The question of contending conceptualisations and spiritualities has arisen in several key debates on land in the transition: the debate concerning the relative merits of private *versus* communal land tenure, debates concerning security of tenure, the debate concerning the grounds upon which the state may expropriate private land (the restrictive 'public purposes' *versus* the broader public interest); and the debate on the matter of compensation for private (overwhelmingly white) landowners whose land is required for redistribution.<sup>7</sup>

The holistic approach to land of Mrs Mfeka is corroborated throughout South Africa. Joe Seremane, the Chief Land Claims Commissioner of the CRLR, writing in the Department of Land Affairs's 1996 Calendar, entitled 'Celebrating the Land,' states:

Every child in this land has a birthright. The umbilical cord between children and mother earth tells them where they come from, where they belong (Seremane in DLA 1995e).

<sup>6</sup>Dobs Mfeka, *Weekly Mail*, 15 April, 1988.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Janet Small and Harald Winkler, *Botho Sechabeng: A Feeling of Community - A description of forms of tenure in Transvaal rural communities by the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC)*, Johannesburg, 1993; Aninka Claassens, 'For whites only - land ownership in South Africa' in M. De Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991, pp.43-61; *Who Owns South Africa: Can the Repeal of the Land Acts De-Racialise Land Ownership in South Africa?*, Johannesburg, 1991; 'Dealing with Group and Individual Rights in Land Settlements and Awards,' unpublished briefing, Johannesburg, 1994; Catherine Cross, 'Informal tenures against the state: Landholding systems in African rural areas, in M. De Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991, pp.63-98; Richard Rosenthal, 'Draft Policy Framework for Legislative Proposals on Communal Ownership,' unpublished briefing, Cape Town, 1994; Colin Murray and Gavin Williams, 'Land and Freedom in South Africa,' *Review of African Political Economy* 61, 1994, pp.315-324.

Nelson Mandela, in his Inaugural Address as State President, reinforced this sense of an umbilical connection between people and land:

Each of us is intimately attached to the soil of this beautiful country. Each time one of us touches the soil of this land we feel a sense of personal renewal.<sup>8</sup>

In an instructive dialogue between African and green hermeneutics, Mandela's words, widely quoted at the time, quickly found their way onto posters of the Environmental Justice Networking Forum over the slogan: 'Restore the Land/Protect the Soil/Renew our Peoples' Future.' The linkages between the land and peoples' future, and between spirituality and praxis in the restoration of land, protection of soil and renewal of future, are well made. We must listen and breathe with these words as part of any praxis, black, white and/or green: they are words of the spirit, of the poetics of intimate relationality, indicating that the land issue in South Africa, whatever else it may be, is a personal and spiritual one, both individually and communally.

Sharpening our awareness of the importance of the conflict of conceptualisations and spiritualities of land for wars of conquest and control of land in South Africa, Leon de Kock makes searching linkages between representational and physical struggles for land in his excellent discussion of the role of missionaries ('would-be colonisers of consciousness') and language in the dispossession of black South Africans:

In South Africa land has always been the subject of contestation. Many wars have been fought over land, but these have not been restricted to physical conflicts only. 'The land' has also been a deeply contested idea in wars of representation which coincided, and were complementary with, 'frontier' conflicts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries ... which were formative in establishing a colonial order in South Africa. If one understands 'representation' in written discourse as being engaged in 'constructing the world, in shaping the modalities of social reality, and in accommodating [its] writers, performers, readers and audiences to multiple and shifting subject positions within the world they both constitute and inhabit' (Montrose 1989:16), and if one understands the term 'frontier' as a geographical and cultural 'contact zone' (Pratt 1992: 6) where forms of knowledge and identity were contested at the same time as wars were fought for land and physical control of the environment, then it becomes clearer to what extent struggles over meaning in the nineteenth century can be seen to have contributed to the making of a reconstituted physical landscape which eventually became 'South Africa' (de Kock 1994: 62).

In concert with De Kock, Willem Saayman views the conflict of Western and African conceptualisations and spiritualities of land through the eyes of a critical history of Christian

<sup>8</sup> Nelson Mandela, *Inaugural Presidential Address*, State Buildings, Pretoria, 10 May, 1994. In June of 1991 the Council of Churches in Namibia hosted a national conference on the land question facing the newly-liberated country. In their *Memorandum of the Churches on the Namibian Land Reform* they include an affirmation of 'Traditional Practices': 'It must also be recognised that traditionally many Namibians have a natural umbilical affinity to the land. Many of our people remain tied to their traditional practices regarding land. These cannot be swept aside and ignored and need to be catered for' (Council of Churches in Namibia, 1991, section 2:8).

mission in South Africa, arguing that in the process of dispossession two 'totally different cultural concepts about ownership of land clashed: the Western concept, with the marketplace as its root metaphor; and the African concept, with its root metaphor of community/communality' (Saayman 1994:15). This difference in conceptualisation, elsewhere described by Saayman as 'the western (capitalist) concept of individual ownership' and the African 'communal "ownership" of land, vested in the king and linked to (a) nomadic and pastoral lifestyle,' is seen to 'underpin the differing interpretation given to land "treaties" by Africans and colonialists' (Saayman 1992: 38-39). A striking example of the validity of Saayman's argument may be found in the conflict of interpretations concerning the ambiguous concession granted by Chief Lobengula to Cecil Rhodes, the subsequent 'Concession' granted by Queen Victoria to the British South Africa Company, and the role of John Moffat, Robert's son, therein (Claassens 1991a: 46; Davenport 1987: 174-177; Pakenham 1991: 381-384).<sup>9</sup> For Saayman there is thus no mystery concerning why 'the religion of the whites' became a focus of the resistance of black South Africans to their dispossession. 'Given the impact of this sad history of the alienation of the land, and the complicity in this process of missionaries, it was probably inevitable that African cultural and religious resistance to colonialism and mission would crystallise around this issue' (Saayman 1994:15).

Saayman cites the case of Prophet Enoch Mgijima and the Israelites, which Saayman calls an 'African initiated church (AIC)',<sup>10</sup> at Ntabelanga near Bulhoek in the Eastern Cape. The Israelites believed the *eschaton* was imminent and viewed Ntabelanga as Zion; accordingly, they refused to leave their holy village even under sustained pressure from the government, army and police, who viewed the Israelites as illegally squatting on land that was not theirs. The confrontation led to an open clash on 24 May, 1921, in which 200-300 Israelites were killed, cut down by 'maxim machines' (Edgar 1988; Bishop Mzilana 1992). What was an illegal occupation of land in the eyes of the white government and local white farmers and residents ('illegal' as a result of the passage in Parliament of the Natives Land Act of 1913, which designated 94% of the land surface as being 'white', leaving but 6% of the land

<sup>9</sup> Tatu Joyi's telling of the story of Ngangelizwe and the land of the Tembu is also often quoted: 'White man brought a piece of paper and made Ngangelizwe put his mark on it. He then said that the paper gave him possession of the land and when Ngangelizwe disputed that, the white man took him to the white court and the court looked at the paper and said Ngangelizwe had to give the white man 4000 morgen of land. The court also said white people needed the land of the Tembus to protect themselves from the Tembus!' (in Mosoma, 1991: 19).

<sup>10</sup> While the terms 'independent' and 'indigenous' are used more often in English to designate the churches which are called, in Sotho/Tswana for example, *Dikereke tsa Moea* or *Dikereke tsa Batho* (the Churches of the Spirit, or the Churches of the People), they are used with some degree of dissatisfaction. The search continues for an ecclesiological terminology which will facilitate dialogue rather than preserve division. Saayman's 'African initiated church,' which preserves the AIC abbreviation, may well be a step forward.



to Black South Africans) was for the Israelites a religio-cultural community convened by God at Ntabelanga - a theological consciousness documented in stone in the inscription on one of the mass graves as follows: 'Because they chose the plan of God, so the world did not have a place for them.'<sup>11</sup> The clash of conceptualisations and spiritualities of land, of the 'root metaphors' of marketplace and community/communality, may be seen to be directly related to the violent clashes on the fields at the foot of Ntabelanga, 'Mountain of the Dawn,' and indeed throughout South Africa since 1652. The struggle for the land was, in view of the conceptual, physical and financial weapons available, 'manifestly unequal' (Cochrane 1987: 21). In the memorable words of the South African historian TRH Davenport, 'It was, in its essentials, a story of black-white confrontation in which the white man, with his superior weapons and his notion of individual ownership, his theodolite and his title deed, generally gained at the expense of the black' (1987: 124).

### 1.2.2 Land, Hermeneutics and Relationality

The foregoing discussion presupposes a linkage between hermeneutics and land struggles that requires elaboration. With so much at stake, land and life, it is not surprising that narratives of the land in South Africa have been contested constructions, and hermeneutics a terrain of struggle wherein the question of discursive power may be seen to be directly related to questions of land ownership, use and care. The struggle over the representation and interpretation of the land and its people has been as fiercely contested as that of the struggle for territory itself, and intimately connected to it. It is a hermeneutical terrain of struggle which comprehends conflicts between and among settler, imperial, resistance and accommodation discourses;<sup>12</sup> History, histories, and living memories;<sup>13</sup> alien-

<sup>11</sup> The massacre of the Israelites and the destruction of their village at Ntabelanga will receive further attention below. While formal written accounts are scarce (cf. Edgar 1988), the speeches at the Commemoration of the Bulhoek Massacre on 21 May, 1992 form a large part of the background to all references to it in this thesis. Bishop Mzimkulu is currently overseeing the process of compiling and editing a written account in the first person, wherein the voices of the Israelites themselves will be heard. For example, a many of those who addressed the Commemoration attached great significance to the fact that 24 May was Jan Smuts' birthday: 'On the birthday of a great man there is a great *mokete* (celebration). Something must be slaughtered for such a feast,' observed one speaker to a rising murmur of recognition. 'What did Jan Smuts have slaughtered for his birthday?!' he asked. The answer was painfully clear as we looked out on the mass graves. It could also be noted that 24 May was British Empire Day. As for the police force: it had been assembled from all over South Africa and, numbering 800, was the largest force of police that had been assembled in "peacetime South Africa" to that point.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Andrew Roberts, ed., *The Colonial Moment in Africa: Essays on the Movement of Minds and Materials, 1900-1940*, Cambridge, 1990; and V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa*, Bloomington, 1988, and *The Idea of Africa*, London, 1994; and John and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Volume One*, Chicago, 1991.

cum-naturalised discourses and autochthonous-cum-alienated discourses,<sup>14</sup> including the mutually formative dynamic between and among foreign and local languages;<sup>15</sup> legislative, legal and *de facto* discourses;<sup>16</sup> patriarchy, feminism and womanism;<sup>17</sup> green and gold discourses;<sup>18</sup> rationality, narrativity, and relationality;<sup>19</sup> and textuality and orality.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*, Oxford, 1994; K. Smith, *The Changing Past: Trends in South African Historical Writing*, Johannesburg, 1988; T.R.H. Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, Johannesburg, 1987; Peter Delius, *The Land Belongs to Us: The Pedi Polity, The Boers and the British in the Nineteenth-Century Transvaal*, Johannesburg, 1983; W. Beinart and C. Bundy, *Hidden Struggles in South African History: Politics and Popular Movements in the Transkei and Eastern Cape, 1890-1930*, Johannesburg, 1987; Colin Bundy, *The Rise and Fall of the South African Peasantry*, Cape Town, 1988; Motsoko Pheko, *Apartheid: The Story of a Dispossessed People*, London, 1984; Peter Burke, ed., *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, Cambridge, 1991; Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley, 1989; Govan Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: A Short History*, Cape Town, 1992; Ellen Kuzwayo, *Sit Down and Listen*, Cape Town, 1990; Don Mattera, *Memory is the Weapon*, Johannesburg, 1988; and Charles van Onselen, *The Seed is Mine: The Life of Kas Maine, A South African Sharecropper 1894-1985*, Cape Town, 1996.

<sup>14</sup> My choice of the word 'autochthonous' reflects on the one hand a dissatisfaction with 'indigenous' in the African context, not least because the word 'indigent' has been taken from the same root - a linkage which suggests that the discursive power involved was not 'indigenous'. On the other hand, its etymology [*auto* + *khithon* (soil, earth)] denotes a strong linkage between people and land, and signifies a radication of people in the soil. Concerning the inter-action of autochthonous and alien discourses, see James Clifford and George Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, London, 1986.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Daniel Kunene, 'Language, Literature and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa,' in E. Jones, E. Palmer and M. Jones, eds., *The Question of Language in African Literature Today*, London, 1991; Leon de Kock, 'Missionaries, Language and the Land,' in *JTSA* 87, 1994, pp.62-68; Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> Geoffrey Bindman, ed., *South Africa: Human Rights and the Rule of Law*, International Commission of Jurists, London, 1988; Aninka Claassens, *Who Owns South Africa? Can the repeal of the Land Acts de-racialise land ownership in South Africa?*, Johannesburg, 1991, and 'For whites only - land ownership in South Africa,' in Michael de Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991, pp.43-62; Catherine Cross, 'Informal tenures against the state: landholding systems in African rural areas,' in Michael de Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991, pp.63-98; Christina Murray and Catherine O'Regan, eds., *No Place to Rest: Forced removals and the Law in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1990; Elaine Unterhalter, *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa*, London, 1987; A.J. Van der Walt, ed., *Land Reform and the Future of Landownership in South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1991.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Denise Ackermann, 'Faith and Feminism: Women Doing Theology,' in J. De Gruchy and C. Villa-Vincencio, eds., *Doing Theology in Context: South African Perspectives*, Theology and Praxis: Volume I, 1994, pp.197-211; Ackermann, D., Draper, J. and Mashinini, E., eds., *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, 1991; Belinda Bozzoli and Mmantho Nkotsoe, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-1983*, Johannesburg, 1991; Jacklyn Cock, *Maids and Madams*, Johannesburg, 1980; M. Friedman, *The Rural Challenge: Women and Land, Gender Co-ordinator's Report to the National Land Committee*, unpublished, January, 1994; Wilma Jakobsen, 'Ethics in Feminist Theology,' in C. Villa-Vincencio and J. De Gruchy, eds., *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives*, Theology and Praxis, Volume II, 1994, pp.148-160; Lauretta Ngcobo, *And They Didn't Die*, London, 1991; Ellen Kuzwayo, *Call Me Woman*, Cape Town, 1985; Peter Rule, *Nokukhanya: Mother of Light*, Braamfontein, 1993; Transvaal Rural Action Committee, *The Rural Womens' Movement: Holding the Knife on the Sharp Edge*, Johannesburg, 1994; Julia Wells, *We Now Demand! The History of Women's Resistance to Pass Laws in South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1993.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. James Clarke, *Back to Earth: South Africa's Environmental Challenges*, Halfway House, 1991; Jacklyn Cock and Eddie Koch, eds., *Going Green: People, Politics and the Environment in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991; Mamphela Ramphele and Chris McDowell, eds., *Restoring the Land: Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, London, 1991.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Crites, 'The Narrative Quality of Experience,' *JAAR* 39, 1971, pp.291-311; Duncan Forrester, *Beliefs, Values and Policies: Conviction Politics in a Secular Age*, Oxford, 1989; Gregory Jones, 'Alasdair MacIntyre on Narrative, Community and the Moral Life,' *Modern Theology* 4:1, 1987, pp.53-69; Stanley



It is not enough, however, simply to state the thatness of the linkage between hermeneutical and territorial struggles for land; its analysis must have an intentionally acknowledged and consistently demonstrated cultural, socio-economic and political location and commitment. Too often and too quickly critiques of dominant, homologising discourses of oppression and dispossession subvert themselves by foregrounding the voices of the elites involved in both the dominant discourse and its critique, thus reinforcing the putative 'voicelessness' of those whose voice they seek in solidarity to interpret and amplify.

To take a recent and instructive example, Edward Said, investigating the relationship between literature and politics in imperialism and in counter-imperialistic resistance, begins usefully with his basic thesis that struggles for land, from dispossession through resistance to restitution, have as much to do with discursive power as they do with military power:

The main battle in imperialism is over land, of course; but when it came to who owned the land, who had the right to settle and work on it, who kept it going, who won it back, and who now plans its future - these issues were reflected, contested and even for a time decided in narrative ... The power to narrate, or to block other narratives from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them. Most important, the grand narratives of emancipation and enlightenment mobilised people in the colonial world to rise up and throw off imperial subjection; in the process, many Europeans and Americans were also stirred by these stories and their protagonists, and they too fought for new narratives of equality and human community (Said 1993: xiii).

Throughout, Said locates himself among those committed to the deconstruction of Eurocentric discourses in the Third World, and engages in a 'contrapuntal reading' of the processes of imperialism and counter-imperialistic resistance, viewing their respective literatures as engaged, or caught, in reciprocal reaction. His critique of Eurocentrism and his locative commitment to the Third World is undermined, however, by the textual choices he makes and the unevenness in the quality of attention he pays to them. Throughout, Said's textual choices and exegesis foreground the textual canon of the West over against that of Third World authors. Paul Tiyembe Zeleza, for example, himself an 'exiled intellectual,' sees

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Hauerwas, 'A Qualified Ethic: The Narrative Character of Christian Ethics,' in *The Peaceable Kingdom - A Primer in Christian Ethics*, London, 1983, pp.17-34; Stanley Hauerwas and David Burrell, 'From System to Story: An Alternative Pattern for Rationality in Ethics,' in Stanley Hauerwas, *Truthfulness and Tragedy: Further Investigations into Christian Ethics*, Notre Dame, 1977; Stanley Hauerwas and Gregory Jones, eds., *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, Grand Rapids, 1989; Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Years as a Tale that is Told': Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chiefdom*, Johannesburg, 1993; Tim Keegan, *Facing the Storm: Portraits of Black Lives in Rural South Africa*, Cape Town, 1988; James McClendon, *Ethics - Systematic Theology*, Volume 1, Nashville, 1986; David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, London, 1991.

<sup>20</sup> William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge, 1987; and Weli Mazamisa, 'Re-reading the Bible in the Black Church: Towards a Hermeneutic of Orality and Literacy,' *JBTS* 9:2, 1995, pp.1-26.

*Culture and Imperialism* as betraying 'deep ambivalences' in Said's political and cultural location. 'All of the western canonical texts examined in *Culture and Imperialism*,' says Zeleza, 'are treated with the kind of hermeneutical engagement, close scrutiny and informed reading which is not accorded to a single African or Asian literary text':

The result is to reconfirm the privileged status, the supremacy of the western literary canon and to marginalise and dismiss African and Asian literatures, thereby subverting his original thesis. Like a rebellious attendant trying to undress the emperor, he becomes engrossed by the texture of the emperor's robes and forgets his original mission (Zeleza 1994: 110-111).

The danger of privileging the very discourse one wishes to deconstruct by focusing on its voice at the expense of, though in the name of, the multiplicity of voices on the ground is well flagged by Zeleza, who goes so far as to accuse Said of betraying 'a political attitude that is essentially elitist and Eurocentric, if one could dare apply such a term to the author of *Orientalism* himself' (1994, 114). Allowing for some degree of overstatement on Zeleza's part, *Culture and Imperialism* presents us with a basic problematic in grounded hermeneutics: that of sustaining a commitment to the voices of the heretofore voice-denied and voice-repressed in a way which facilitates the hearing of their voices without stealing their voice. The problem is one which is encountered daily by lawyers, government officials, loan managers, academics, theologians, pastors, development workers, consultants, and community representatives as they seek to work in creative and critical solidarity with landless and recently land-restored communities.

In the South African context, one successful engagement was that of the African Spiritual Churches Association (ASCA) with the Institute for Contextual Theology (ICT) in the mid 1980s. Archbishop N.H. Ngada, President of ASCA, in the Preface to *Speaking for Ourselves*, the report of the Pilot Study which was designed to initiate an intentional self-theologising process within the *Dikereke tsa Batho/Dikereke tsa Moea* (Churches of the People/Churches of the Spirit), acknowledged the facilitative role of the ICT as follows:

I would also like to express our sincere thanks to ICT and especially to the General Secretary, Frank Chikane, who helped us tirelessly to begin to study our history and to articulate our theology in our own way. We are also grateful to Father Albert Nolan, also of ICT, who helped us to compile this booklet from the material collected during the pilot study. Both of them have tried to do no more than help us speak for ourselves.<sup>21</sup>

The self-theologising *who* ('ourselves') is primary. When Paul Makhubu, for example, writes about the Independent Churches the question he asks, and the title of his book, is, *Who Are the Independent Churches?* (1988). One of the ways in which Makhubu answers this

<sup>21</sup> N.H. Ngada, in ASCA, ed., *Speaking for Ourselves*, Braamfontein, 1985, p.7.

question of identity is to refute the view that the Independent Churches are those who have been co-opted or quieted with respect to the struggle for political liberation in South Africa. In response to the question, which he sees as misguided, 'Why are the Independent Churches not publicly involved in politics?' Makhubu shoots back, 'How must they be involved?! *Politics is them!* Discussions evolve around them. They are the oppressed and suffering who express their aspirations in a variety of ways' (1988: 68). When this same charge of political quietism is raised in *Speaking for Ourselves*, the answer again foregrounds the theological *who*:

The members of our Churches are the poorest of the poor, the people with the lowest jobs or with no jobs at all ... Our people therefore know what it is to be oppressed, exploited and crushed ... And so what do our people do about it? They join political organisations or trade unions and take part in the struggle for our liberation. But it is a matter of individual choice. Politics is not a Church matter ... People meet together in our Churches to pray and to worship and to experience the healing of the Spirit. They go to political organisations in order to take actions (in the struggle). The 'Churches of the People' and the political organisations or the trade unions of the people have different roles to play. It is often the same people who belong to both (1985: 31).

Similarly, when Bonganjalo Goba considers his *Agenda for Black Theology* (1988), the first section under the heading 'The Context of Black Theological Reflection' is '*Who We Are: A Theological Assessment*,' wherein he discusses 'the challenge of being black' and 'an appraisal of who we are.' It is significant that the voice is in the first person, and that it is plural: *who we are*. Goba sets his goal as that of providing a 'basis for a critical theological hermeneutic' for doing theology in South Africa, and argues throughout that 'theology must become a communal praxis,' by which he means that it 'must reflect the commitment of the Black Christian community to engage in social change' (1988:1). In the epigram at the head of the chapter, Goba, highlighting a south/north theological dialogue, quotes John Macquarrie as saying, 'The primary datum of Christian Theology is the Christian community itself, the people of God' (1988:21). Already, however, with the introduction of the word 'datum' a more distanced discourse is signalled. The difference is one of voice - the move from a first- to a third-person discourse. It is the difference between a *Speaking for Ourselves*, on the one hand, and a solidarity discourse on the other. Both are important, of course, and hold great potential for mutual spiritual and socio-economic and political empowerment; but they must not be confused. When Basil Moore, for example, an American whose role was pivotal during the early days of black theology in South Africa, sought to articulate a definition, his point of departure was indeed the people; yet, it must be noted that he was dealing with the theological *who* in the third person:

Black theology seeks to cut across the classical detachment. It begins with people, specific people, in a specific situation and with specific problems to face. Thus it starts in the South

African situation facing strangling problems of oppression, fear, hunger, insult and dehumanisation. It tries to understand as clearly as possible who these people are, what their life experiences are, and the nature and cause of their suffering. This is an indispensable datum of black theology (1974: 6).

The point here is not to critique the theological voice in the third-person as being invalid. This thesis itself, it will be immediately observed, moves between voices in the first and third person, and finds its own voice for the most part in the third person. It is, however, to distinguish the voice in the first person from the voice in the third person in a theology that places so vital a priority on the hermeneutical *who*. The question of sustaining trust and accountability, already critical within the realm of the first person plural, becomes crucial when the voice moves from the first to the third person, and is a question that requires ongoing consultative evaluation.

Hermeneutical struggles over land, then, are not only powerfully relevant for territorial struggles over land, they are so in an inter-personal way, involving a complex web of relational pathways. From a grounded perspective, discursive power concerning the land is a relational power, and is so in the areas of both human-human relationality and human-land relationality. As noted above, questions about the land are immediately also questions about its people, and as such are relational in dynamic and multivalent in signification. Thus it is the *who questions* that are seen to come to the fore in a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution, and other questions, be they religio-cultural, historical-legal, familial-communal, socio-economic, political, agricultural-environmental, or developmental are seen in the light of this relationality.

In a grounded hermeneutics the *who* questions are asked from the point of view of the people who live on the land. Specifically, in this thesis the hermeneutical *who* question is asked from the point of view of those forcibly removed from their ancestral land and who, having suffered the impoverishment, division and attrition of relocation, are now in the process of returning and re-rooting themselves in their soil. It is acknowledged that there are others who live on the land; however, their narratives and hermeneutics, having participated in the discursive power of white South Africans since the seventeenth century, have been more widely published and heard. This is not to say that it is not important to listen to the voices of, for example, white farmers on the land; on the contrary, their voices are as important now for the new South Africa as they have been in the past for the old, for the inclusive vision of the new South African will not be realised, and could well be frustrated, without them. Rather, it is to say that the focus of this thesis is on the hermeneutics of land restitution of the communities who are part of the Back to the Land Campaign. As will be seen, they themselves invite their



white neighbours to participate in an inclusive hermeneutical process, both critical and creative, rejecting counter-exclusivity in favour of an enabling vision of a shared land.

The hermeneutical *who* is thus asked before the hermeneutical *how*, *what* and *why* in a grounded hermeneutics. The interpreter is fore-grounded over that which is interpreted, and the question of how the interpretation is made is seen to begin with the identity of the interpreter(s). The texts and traditions, ruins and landscapes, events and situations being interpreted are approached with what we may thus call a *relational hermeneutic*. The questions: who narrates, who writes and in whose interests, for example, are inseparable from questions that ask: what is the (hi)story, what does the record say, how is it employed and what is its intention with respect to the land? Similarly, questions concerning the religio-cultural and socio-economic and political locations and commitments of the interpreters are approached with a people-first bias. Grounded hermeneutics is thus relational before it is ideological. Differently put, the ideological is analysed and critiqued in light of the relational. The interpreter is not an abstract identity, to be located in an analytical discourse defined away from the land by people who do not live on the land. It is thus not enough to say that interpretation is affected in a determinative way by the socio-economic and political location and interests of the interpreter, as if we could accurately predict the interpretation by identifying the interpreter in economic and ideological terms. There is too much variation of interpretation among those who would be seen to fit into the same demographic categories. Nor is it enough to then include the culture of the interpreter, as if culture was homogeneous, static and every individual 'within' a given culture experienced it and reflected upon it in the same way. Demographic and cultural considerations are necessary but are not in themselves sufficient. A sense of autobiography, wherein the voice of the interpreter is heard in the first person, is also necessary. It is as important, for example, to know someone's name and the story of her name, and how she feels and what she is thinking when dancing together with other members of her community in their annual re-enactment of the exodus story, as it is to know that the community in question is comprised of the survivors and descendants of the Church of the Israelites who were massacred at Ntabelanga, Bulhoek, on 24 May, 1921, following their refusal to move from Ntabelanga<sup>22</sup> - as has been noted above. The latter point is indispensable for an ideologically critical hermeneutics of liberation and transformation; however, in a

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Robert Edgar, *Because They Chose the Plan of God: The Story of the Bulhoek Massacre*, Johannesburg, 1988; and Willem Saayman, 'Christian Mission: A Historical Reflection,' in C. Duraisingh, ed., *Churches in Mission: South Africa - International Review of Mission*, LXXXIII:328, January 1994, pp.11-19. See also the discussion of relationality in the biblical hermeneutics articulated during the Commemoration of the Bulhoek Massacre, 24 May 1992, in chapter 6.

grounded hermeneutics it is approached through the relationality and personal reflection indicated by the former point. In short, the land is its people before it is an issue.

The same may be said to hold true for meta-narrative and land. In meta-narratives of national identity, for example, we must ask who holds and exercises the discursive power to *say* a people, to construct a history, to define an identity. In meta-narratives of emancipation, we must ask in whose voice we have the narratives and analysis of oppression, in whose voice the definition of liberation? For example, in whose voice do we have the narratives of dispossession, resistance and return? Are there voices missing? Are some people being said, women for example, rather than speaking for themselves and being heard in their own voices? Are some voices seeking to be heard but being suppressed?<sup>23</sup> In short, the encoding and decoding of oral and written discourse concerning the land are an inherent part of the struggle for it, and the questions fore-grounded in a grounded approach are: who are the interpreters and do they speak in their own voice(s)?

It will be objected that the text itself has not featured prominently enough thus far to allow the hermeneutical circulation of interpreter and that which is interpreted to proceed. It is a reasonable concern. Two points may be made in response at this stage. First, the importance of orality in the TLRC communities (a matter variously of tradition, low levels of literacy and of communicative preference) means that even written texts are mediated by a person, a reader reading orally, and thus are already being interpreting through the vocal tones, textures and kinesics of the oral communicator. Written texts, biblical for example, are thus more heard than read in the communities; interpretation thus involves as an inherent dynamic the interpersonal and sociological (e.g. gender and race) aspects of the orality of communication. There is, moreover, a sense in which the orality of communication involved in the reading aloud of biblical texts returns us to the oral traditions underlying, for example, the gospels. The process of fixing the *kerygma* of the early church in written texts has received exhaustive treatment,<sup>24</sup> the reverse process of hearing the written word as read aloud by a reader/interpreter has received relatively little attention.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Trinh T. Minh-ha, writing of difference and women in the third world, speaks with anguish of the influence of removal and relocation on the being and voice of the dispossessed: "You who understand the dehumanisation of forced removal-relocation-reeducation-redefinition, the humiliation of having to falsify your own reality, your voice - you know. And often cannot say it. You try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said." Quoted by Michele Wallace in, 'Reading 1968 and the Great American Whitewash,' in B. Kruger and P. Mariani, eds., *Remaking History*, Dia Art Foundation, Discussion in Contemporary Culture Number 4, Seattle, 1989, pp.97-109.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments*, London, 1936.

<sup>25</sup> See discussion in William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word: Oral Aspects of Scripture in the History of Religion*, Cambridge, 1987.



There is a sense in which this point takes us back to the etymological roots of the word 'hermeneutics', and there is value in remembering the story of Hermes and what may be learned from it in the context of a grounded hermeneutics. The etymological root refers us to the god Hermes, messenger of the Greek pantheon, charged with the task of conveying the words and coded intimations (secret intentions) of the gods to mortals. As Marcella Althaus-Reid has observed, following Ricoeur, 'Apart from carrying the message that needed to be deciphered, Hermes himself, by the mere fact of his presence, was a sort of "significant text": To see him was the equivalent of knowing that "someone wanted to say something about something to someone."' In this sense, Hermes himself was a living text' (Althaus-Reid 1993:6). To decipher the messages delivered by Hermes, however, required a procedure for decoding them, hence 'hermeneutics' as technique. While the deliverances of Hermes, and of diviners, for example, were oral, they functioned as written texts in the sense that they allowed no dialogue between interpreter and that which was being interpreted. They were 'closed texts', enigmas, requiring that the code be 'cracked'. We are thus still some distance from a theory that sees texts in events and human actions, for example. On the other hand, we are already beyond a narrow conception of text as written discourse, and the question of distinguishing between message and medium has already been introduced (Althaus-Reid 1993: 7). The hermeneutical *who* may thus be seen to be present in the etymology of the term.

The second point concerning the place of text in relational hermeneutics has already been signalled: the use of the phrase 'that which is interpreted' in place of 'text' serves to indicate a wider conception of text than that of a fixed, written record. While written texts are of great importance in grounded hermeneutics (title deeds, biblical texts and texts on gravestones for example), a wider sense of text is employed in a grounded hermeneutics, wherein the presence of ruins where the homes, schools, and churches of a community once stood; the presence of graves in a landscape; the signs of desertification in marginal land in the 'dumping grounds' of apartheid; the chromatic correspondences of green with white, and brown with black, on the land; and the lines in the faces and hands of people who have been exposed to grinding poverty and have survived, to mention but a few, are viewed and interpreted as 'texts'. There is a sense in which the landscape may thus be read as a discourse of images, intimately related to the lives of the people of whom they witness.

One such text is that of the gravestone of Hector Zolile Pieterse, the first student shot and killed on June 16, 1976, when South African Police opened fire on students peacefully protesting the imposition of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in South African schools. Pieterse is buried in Avalon Cemetery, Soweto; his grave number is EC 462. Over the years

the text on his gravestone, beginning with his name and dates of birth and death, has served as a historical, spiritual and political discourse on suffering, struggle, solidarity, and hope. A representation follows of the wording on the original stone:

<b>ZOLILE</b>	<b>HECTOR</b>
<b>PIETERSON</b>	
XXXX	
XXXX	August 19, 1963
fist	June 16, 1976
<p>DEEPLY MOURNED BY HIS PARENTS, SISTERS AND A NATION THAT REMEMBERS.</p> <p>TIME IS ON THE SIDE OF THE OPPRESSED TODAY. TRUTH IS ON THE SIDE OF THE OPPRESSED TODAY.</p> <p>ONE AZANIA, ONE NATION, ONE PEOPLE.</p> <p>R. I. P.</p>	

The grave site was desecrated and the stone shattered on the morning of June 16, 1989, the thirteenth anniversary of the massacre. On different occasions I visited the grave site with Sowetans and put the pieces of the headstone back together, much as a jigsaw puzzle is put together, using the wording and art-work (the defiant raised fist) on the stone as our guide to which piece went where. On the first occasion we reassembled the pieces in the grass at the head of the grave; on the second occasion, June 16, 1990, we put the pieces together inside the grave area with members of Hector Pieterse's family. A friend visiting from Canada, Gary Kenny of the Inter-Church Coalition on Africa (ICCAF), made two telling observations about the scene: first, the grass had recently been burnt in the cemetery, creating an ashen landscape around the graves, and second, when the stone had been shattered, one piece in the lower right-hand corner had remained standing, secured to one of the iron rods that had anchored the stone to its foundation. The word 'PEOPLE' was written on that piece of stone. 'The people are still standing,' said Gary. The gravestone had, by that time, acquired two texts: the lines of words and the lines of fracture. One could read the lines of fracture as the text 'between the lines' of words, or one could read the lines of words as the text 'between the lines' of fracture. In 1992

a new stone was commissioned, cut, erected and unveiled by the family and representatives of the 'nation that remembers' - the fracture lines of the shattered first stone now no longer visible. Reading such a text, its words and texture, clearly involves making relational connections between the text, the people to whom it witnesses, and oneself as interpreter-in-community. Beyond making such relational connections, the interpreter enters into, engages and is engaged by the human world of that which is interpreted, following the relational hermeneutical pathways of suffering, *koinonia*, struggle, celebration and transformation.

### **1.3 Grounded Hermeneutics in Local Land Struggles**

The transition period in South Africa has occasioned a broad interpretive crisis, involving a review of previously-held positions and directions on all sides, and requiring critical reflection on the basic question of what it means to interpret in such a context. As Gerald West has noted, following Tracy (1987), the interpretive process itself is in need of interpretation in a context of transition - a context wherein interpretations matter more obviously than usual (West, 1991:2). The hermeneutical context is dynamic, marked by convergences and divergences, revisitations and realignments. With respect to the grounded hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, the states of play between and among Black and African hermeneutics, Black and Prophetic hermeneutics, Black African and Womanist hermeneutics, and Black, White and Green hermeneutics, are of particular import. Questions of convergence and divergence in the changing hermeneutical context will be considered below.

#### **1.3.1 A Critical Convergence of Black and African Hermeneutics**

One of the most readily discernible characteristics of the hermeneutics of the members of the TLRC communities with respect to land and their struggles for it is its inter-relation of the religio-cultural, the historical-legal, and the socio-economic and political. One way of expressing this in relation to wider debates in the South African hermeneutical context is to speak of a convergence of liberation and inculturation in grounded hermeneutics.<sup>26</sup> Again, we could speak of a convergence of Black and African in their hermeneutics. At the same time, we must remember that such a correlation already risks distortion. What I have been calling the multivalent integrality of grounded hermeneutics is not to be identified with a convergence of Black and African in the wider hermeneutical debate in South Africa. The grounded hermeneutics of local communities must be heard in its own voice, wherein lies its integrity and



its challenge to its wider hermeneutical context. In the event, a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution may be seen to be calling for a critical convergence of Black and African theology in the wider context, yet also for a redefinition of the two, respectively and reciprocally, as they converge. For this reason, terms like Josiah Young's 'Black African',<sup>27</sup> must be used with caution, and perhaps with the prefix rural-, in the attempt to name more specifically the multivalent integrality of grounded hermeneutics in relation to the wider hermeneutical context in South Africa.

In interviews with published theologians, the conjunction of African and Black hermeneutics in the TLRC communities with respect to land was acknowledged with joy by many who, largely unnecessarily, have been identified as being *either* Black *or* African theologians. Itumeleng Mosala, for example, sees such a conjunction as a return to the initial unity and interaction of cultural and political analyses present in the early days of the black consciousness movement in South Africa:

**Q:** Looking at African theology and Black theology in the communities themselves, the two are very closely related. The term 'stable-mates' doesn't do, they're almost (intertwining fingers of hands) -

**Mosala:** Inseparable.

**Q:** Inseparable, yes. And people, as they're telling their stories and reflections, intertwine the two, so that there's no way I can separate them, as in a separate chapter on each: African theology and the land struggle; Black theology and the land struggle, because they're so closely related on the ground.

**Mosala:** Well absolutely. Absolutely.

**Q:** And I wondered now if you are not seeing some motion in this direction. David Mosoma in his article in the Land Issue of the *Journal of Black Theology*, for example, spoke of both. I mean, why aren't we hearing more reflection on the matters of the ancestors, umbilical cords and rain?

**Mosala:** Well, because the SACC remained a white institution in black hands. And therefore the unity which we built from the beginning - when the black consciousness movement started the cultural thing was very important. Steve Biko, for example, in his writing - he even said about the church that it was important for us to recover the cultural dynamics of the struggle, to let those inform the current black political practice. And initially that was there! You know, people were going back to the roots in order to be able to encounter the struggle today. But as soon as we took that struggle theologically and put it into the hands of an institution like the SACC, which then addressed political issues as matter issues, you know, that had no rooting in communities -

**Q:** Yes, there was a lot of abstraction of political issues.

**Mosala:** Yes.

**Q:** Yes. It is the people who are important - and the issues are only important insofar as they emerge from and continue to be important for people's lives.

**Mosala:** Exactly, yes. And that link broke.

**Q:** Yes. And so you run the risk of getting an issue-oriented solidarity and not a people-oriented solidarity in the churches.

**Mosala:** That's right.

<sup>26</sup> The pairing of terms is that of Emmanuel Martey (1993).

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Josiah Young, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors*, Trenton, N.J., 1992; and *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, London, 1993.

**Q:** So the richness -

**Mosala:** Just goes away.

**Q:** Just is lost.

**Mosala:** So I would go all the way with this. I really would go all the way with it. I would say that the political process, again, as in text and interpreter, the political process interrogates and interacts with peoples' history and culture. Similarly, peoples' history and culture must critically inform the political process. I've been complaining about the constitution, the new constitution, saying I've never seen such an un-African document! ...

**Q:** We need to move on from the two or three camps we are in now: cultural theology, prophetic theology, black theology. On the ground in rural communities things are more integrated.

**Mosala:** They are plied together.<sup>28</sup>

The need for a mutual interrogation of the cultural, historical and political in the hermeneutics of a Black Theology that seeks to be a useful weapon in the struggle for black liberation has been a concern of Mosala's for some time. In an article entitled 'The Use of the Bible in Black Theology,' published in *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free* (Mosala and Tlhagali, eds, 1986) Mosala deals with 'the question of the historical-cultural foundations and links of black theology and how these affect black theology's biblical hermeneutical assumptions' - this because 'people's reading of the Bible is framed by their history and culture' (1986:187). In a conclusion that brings him close to the land hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, Mosala states that 'black theology needs to relocate itself within the historical and cultural struggles of the black people' (1986: 196-197). In so saying, Mosala may be seen to be working out in detail one of the seminal assertions of black consciousness, made by Steve Biko, that 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude' (Biko 1988: 108).

A critical convergence of Black and African hermeneutics, which may be seen to be 'plied together' on the ground in the TLRC communities, has much in common with Emmanuel Martey's analysis of the complementarity of liberation and inculturation hermeneutics in *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (1993) and with Josiah Young's call for a conjoining of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses in *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors* (1992) and his *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography* (1993). That these are recent works may be seen to signal a convergent direction, even a healing direction, in how African and African American theologians are approaching the political, economic and cultural in

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Itumeleng Mosala, University of Cape Town, 20 April 1994, unpublished, pp.15-16. See also David Mosoma, 'Justice, Peace, Reparation and Restitution,' *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* 5:2, November 1991, 12-28, and discussion below.



Black African theology. Inside South Africa, two recent consultations on culture and Christianity have underlined the movement towards a conjoining of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses in a way that indicates that their critical convergence is already one of the distinguishing marks of the hermeneutics of the transition period.<sup>29</sup> The complex convergences and divergences of different cultural traditions in a dynamic political context call for an re-examination of the religio-cultural and socio-economic and political demarcations and dichotomisations that have been made both within and without liberation struggles over the years.<sup>30</sup> The dynamics of transition call for a theoretical and praxiological realignment, one in which local actors play a significant, if not a leading, role.

That there are divergences as well as convergences at work within the broadly-based coalitions of actors involved in the transformation of South Africa at the local level must be acknowledged; the degree of convergence to date of cultural and political hermeneutics in Black African struggles must not be overstated. The approach of the TLRC communities to their white neighbours, for example, is somewhat divergent from a Marxist hermeneutic of struggle in that it is more dialogical than dialectic, more willing to approach neighbouring white farmers as potential co-operants, than to write them off as unreconstructable adversaries in a class struggle. This approach of the TLRC is consistent with the critically inclusive vision of a shared land which prevails among its member communities - a mark, as we will see in the chapter which follows, of both grace and shrewdness. While the oppositionality of a race-and-class analysis of the settler, colonial and apartheid eras is valued as necessary and liberating with respect to a liberation *from*,<sup>31</sup> there is in the praxis and discourse of the communities a desire to move beyond oppositionality to a hermeneutics of liberation *to* and *for*. With respect

<sup>29</sup> The *National Ecumenical Consultation of Christianity, African Culture and Development in Southern Africa*, held at Telkom College, 9-12 August, 1994 (see report in *Challenge*, 27, December, 1994, p20-21); and *Christianity and African Culture*, the theme of the third annual School of Theology hosted by the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa (RICSA), University of Cape Town, 24-26 January, 1995 (see report in *Missionalia* 1995, pp.3-6). See also the discussion in chapter 2 on conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses.

<sup>30</sup> See the discussion in Cornel West, 'Black Culture and Postmodernism,' in B. Kruger P. Mariani, eds., *Remaking History*, Dia Art Foundation, Discussions in Contemporary Culture Number 4, Seattle, 1989, pp.87-96. While West is discussing convergence and divergence in an American context, with particular reference to African-American struggles on the 'ragged edges' of an America whose centre has been defined by whites, his analysis is useful both in its appreciation of the dynamics of survival and change in such a context, and in its employment of a language through which the voices from the 'ragged edges' may be heard. He speaks, for example, of cultural weapons like 'kinetic orality', 'passionate physicality' and 'combative spirituality' (pp.91-93) - to which we will return below.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Lebamang Sebidi, 'The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and Its Implications for Black Theology,' in I. Mosala and B. Tlhagali, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Essays in Black Theology*, Johannesburg, 1986, pp.1-36. Sebidi argues that what had to that point been an oppositional either-or approach to race and class analysis in the struggle against apartheid must become a more comprehensive analysis of 'a racial capitalism' that equated the 'swart gevaar' with the 'rooi gevaar'. The presence in the same anthology of

to hermeneutics in general in the transition period this move may be seen as a felt need to practise a *hermeneutics of affirmation* of what can be, while retaining the services of a *hermeneutics of suspicion* of what must not again be, and of what persists from what has been.<sup>32</sup> That is, local hermeneutics looks both backwards and forwards. Differently put, it may be said that suspicion without affirmation deconstructs the old without building the new; and affirmation without suspicion tries to build the new in the context of the old, thereby subverting itself. An ongoing dialogue between the two may be seen to comprehend what Sandra Schneiders has called a hermeneutics of transformation,<sup>33</sup> dealing with the transformation of both consciousness and structures.

Immediately this is said, however, questions arise concerning the extent to which the socio-economic and political analysis of the communities is sharp enough, penetrating enough, to avoid what is seen in Black theological quarters as a too-moderate approach to the transition, especially with respect to land and economic liberation and empowerment. With respect to Black biblical hermeneutics, for example, the post-exilic return to and reconstruction of Jerusalem, often cited as a significant textual tradition in struggles for land restitution, is seen to have been permitted in the first instance and facilitated in the second by the Persian King, Artaxerxes.<sup>34</sup> Critical linkages are made between the Persian royal sponsorship of Nehemiah's project and the current extent to which white political and financial actors within and without South Africa are influencing the direction of the transition.<sup>35</sup> A clash of economic interests and political agenda is discerned within the dynamics of the Reconstruction and Development Programme of the transition, and a series of contradictions are flagged within the

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articles written by Bernadette Mosala and Bonita Bennett also signalled the inclusion of gender analysis in Black Theology.

<sup>32</sup> The terms 'hermeneutics of suspicion' and 'hermeneutics of affirmation' owe much to the work of Paul Ricoeur in philosophical hermeneutics. The former in particular has played a significant role in the Latin American development of liberation theology and in theologies of liberation throughout the world. 'Affirmation', and sometimes the 'hermeneutics of trust' (West 1991), has been a more recent exploration for both Ricoeur and liberation theologians. See Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'Paul Ricoeur and the Theology of Liberation: The Hermeneutics of J. Severino Croatto, Juan Luis Segundo, and Clodovis Boff', unpublished PhD Thesis, University of St. Andrew's, 1993; and David Wood, ed., *On Paul Ricoeur: Narrative and Interpretation*, London, 1991.

<sup>33</sup> See Sandra Schneiders, 'Feminist Ideology Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics,' *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 19, 1989, 3-10.

<sup>34</sup> Nehemiah 2:1-20. Verses 5-8 read as follows: 'Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it." The king said to me (the queen also was sitting beside him), "How long will you be gone, and when will you return?" So it pleased the king to send me, and I set him a date. Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors of the province Beyond the River, that they may grant me passage until I arrive in Judah; and a letter to Asaph, the keeper of the king's forest, directing him to give me timber to make beams for the gates of the temple fortress, and for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall occupy." And the king granted me what I asked, for the gracious hand of my God was upon me. Then I came to the governors of the province Beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent officers of the army and cavalry with me' (NRSV).

transition in general, wherein political liberation is revealed to be but indirectly related to economic liberation and empowerment, and old-guard economic power is revealed to have retained its restrictive if not determinative influence over the political process.<sup>36</sup> The needs and aspirations of the poor continue to be more spoken for than heard in their own voice, and in a way that camouflages the depth of the gap between the legitimacy and the realisability of goals.

The question is thrown into even sharper relief when the matter of convergence is addressed with respect to gender in liberation hermeneutics, wherein the convergence may be said to be proceeding against significant internal resistance.<sup>37</sup> The same may be said concerning the signs of convergence with respect to black and white in hermeneutics at the local level, wherein the contradiction between ongoing poverty and increasing political liberation places any movement towards convergence on unstable ground.<sup>38</sup> In this regard, a point made by Klippiess Kritzingler during a meeting of the SACC Ad Hoc Committee on Land is well taken: 'We will not find common ground until everyone has some ground.'<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, the movement towards convergence in black and white feminist and womanist hermeneutics and praxis in South Africa is instructive in general for the conflict of hermeneutics between and among race, class and gender in the transition.<sup>40</sup>

Two things need to be said at this stage. First, any move away from liberation hermeneutics in the transition period, as if it has done its duty and may now be graduated from, is dangerously premature. We must continue to say 'no!' to the legacies of apartheid even as we begin to say 'yes!' to the potentialities for peace, justice and prosperity in the

<sup>35</sup> See the Interview with Itumeleng Mosala, op cit., p.7.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the government's *Macro-Economic Strategy on Growth, Employment and Redistribution*, announced by the ANC's Trevor Manuel, Minister of Finance, in mid-1996, occasioned heated debate among players and organisations engaged in the economic empowerment of the poor. Some perceived a change of commitment and direction on the part of the ANC concerning the respective roles of government and of the market in the economic transformation of South Africa, declaring the *Strategy* to be a sell-out to supply-side interests; others insisted that the accent was on strategy and not principle in the new policy (cf. 'The Great Debate - A Special Supplement dealing with the Economy,' in the *Mail & Guardian*, July 19 to 25 1996).

<sup>37</sup> The proceedings of the Community Land Conference, 12-13 February, 1994, discussed above, remain the most dramatic expression of the potentiality and contingency of convergence between patriarchal and womanist hermeneutics in the Back to the Land Campaign.

<sup>38</sup> A case in point is that of Meshack Mbambalala, the first black mayor of Ventersdorp, who following his election in 1995, continued to live in a tin shack in a squatter camp just outside the town. He also continued to be barred from membership in the whites-only (still) country club. Ventersdorp, in the North West Province, is noted for being the headquarters of the neo-Nazi Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB), the Afrikaner Resistance Movement, dedicated to the retention of small-town rural apartheid. In the teeth of a campaign to discredit him, and facing death-threats, Mbambalala nonetheless is said to speak proudly of his new-born son whom he has named Nhlenganiso, the Xhosa word for reconciliation. See 'Afrikaners scorn their black mayor,' in *The Sunday Times*, 26 November, 1995, p 24.

<sup>39</sup> Klippiess Kritzingler, Meeting of the Ad Hoc Committee on Land, SACC, 29 May, 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ackermann, Draper and Mashinini, eds., *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, 1991.



transition period.<sup>41</sup> The past does indeed cast a shadow on the present. The ongoing impoverishing force of dispossession, for both people and the land itself, must be met with a sophisticated hermeneutic which is both critical and creative, suspicious and affirmative, deconstructive and reconstructive. Second, that local hermeneutics employs both suspicion and affirmation may be seen as part of an overall strategy of what we may call, adapting the term from Cornel West, prophetic pragmatism.<sup>42</sup> *Phronesis*, with a bias for what works, is never far from the hermeneutics and praxis of the TLRC communities. In short, the discussion of a critical convergence of Black and African, and of Feminist and Womanist, hermeneutics thus far points to the following interim conclusion: in a context of transition, direction is as important as position.

### 1.3.2 The Multivalent Integrality of Ancestral Hermeneutics

As will be discussed at length in the following chapter, the graves of the ancestors have been of both spiritual and strategic importance in local struggles for ancestral land - a *locus theologicus* with multivalent significance for the communities. The final section of the *Memorandum* from land-less communities to the multi-party negotiators at Kempton Park, dated 25 June 1993, is apposite: 'If the negotiators do not address at least the minimum demand of restoration urgently, the only course of action left to our communities is to return to our land. Let them remove us again: we would rather die on our land than to live away from it! The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return. MAYIBUYE!'<sup>43</sup> Local hermeneutics with respect to the graves of the ancestors reads both the surface texts etched into the stones (those that have written texts) and the subjacent text of ancestral tradition signified by the graves. Not wishing to anticipate unduly the argument of chapter two, this section will confine itself to an introduction of ancestral hermeneutics as part of the wider hermeneutical context of a grounded theology of land restitution in South Africa. In particular, we will examine the ways in which religio-cultural analysis is conjoined with socio-economic and

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Charles Villa-Vincencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction*, Cape Town, 1992; and Sam Maluleke, 'Do We Need a Theology of Reconstruction?', unpublished paper, UNISA, 1994. See also the debate between Villa-Vincencio and Maluleke entitled, 'Do We Need a Theology of Reconstruction?' published in *Challenge* 25, 1994, pp 20-22, 28.

<sup>42</sup> The term 'prophetic pragmatism' forms the title of the final chapter of Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*, Madison, 1989, and is an aptly reflexive description of the strategic employment of traditional duties such as cleaning the graves of the ancestors as a means of getting a 'foot hold' back on the land. Such strategies are not all ploy, however, beyond their instrumentality lie ancestral traditions still very much alive in the communities, as will be seen in the following chapter.

<sup>43</sup> See the *Memorandum to the Multi-Party Negotiators from Rural Communities Seeking Restoration of their Land*, Back to the Land Campaign, 25 June, 1993.

political analysis in the work of Weli Mazamisa and David Mosoma, with specific reference to land.

Welile Mazamisa, in a speech made at a book-launch hosted by the Western Province Council of Churches at the University of the Western Cape one week before the historic April 1994 elections,<sup>44</sup> articulated a conjunction of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political themes in land issues when he spoke explicitly of an 'ancestral hermeneutics' that interpreted land as the interactive *locus* of the *ubuntu*fication of God on earth.<sup>45</sup> Seeing land as 'the issue around which all other issues in South Africa cohere,' Mazamisa asserted the multivalent significance of land in people's lives: 'Land is not only an economic or agricultural issue, or an historical or political issue, it is a theological issue, and for our people it is a very emotional issue.' He then asked: 'Why should this be?' His answer, weaving a strong theological and ethical fabric, was as follows:

Land is heaven and earth. Land *ubuntu*fies God. Land is the *ubuntu*fication of God. Otherwise God remains a sky God. God becomes a person through land. God can only become the 'word that became flesh' when God touches earth ... When we look to heaven we can hardly see God. God remains a sky God that way. When God comes to earth we can see his feet. On earth he pitches his tent. Land is the translation point between heaven and earth. God is a God who related to human beings, that is the God of Israel...

Land relates to food production - directly. Bread. The sustenance of people. We pray, 'Give us this day our daily bread.' Land is prayer, as well as the answer to prayer. Whoever removes land from someone interferes with God's answer to people's prayers...

Land relates to the ancestors. *To appreciate this we need an ancestral hermeneutics concerning land.* Land is the blanket which covers the ancestors. When you take away someone's land, you take away the blanket which covers their ancestors. This is not always articulated in political discourse, but it is very important, central, in peoples' lives on the land and in their struggles for it.

Land is the transport by which God is carried to human beings. Land *ubuntu*fies God; land makes God personal, so that human beings can relate to God and God to humans. Any theology which does not *ubuntu*fy God is in trouble. For people, God needs ground to stand on.<sup>46</sup>

Mazamisa is engaging in a deep hermeneutics that goes to the core of both the divine and the human, seeing land as the 'translation point' between the two. It is a Black African hermeneutics in its conjoining of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analysis, as

<sup>44</sup> The books launched at the meeting were the first two numbers in the Relevant Church Series of the WPCC. See Mirjam van Donk, *Land and the Church: The Case of the Dutch Reformed Churches*, Cape Town, 1994; and van Donk, ed., *Land Issues and Challenges to the Church - A Reader*, Cape Town, 1994.

<sup>45</sup> *Ubuntu*, and its Sotho counterpart, *botho*, are words not easily translated into English. They express a relational view of humanity and way of life that says that being human is a being-in-community, that it is not possible for a person to be human alone, for it is of the essence of being human that we are so with, through and because of others. *Ubuntu-botho* is expressed in the proverb: *motho ke motho ka batho* (Sotho/Tswana); *umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu* (Nguni); a person is a person through other people. The immediate context of Mazamisa's speech provides the best elucidation of what he means by his statement that 'land is the *ubuntu*fication of God'.



is evident in his references to *ubuntufication*, land as bread and prayer, and an explicitly ancestral hermeneutics. It is also an articulation that signals the poetics of ancestral hermeneutics: land the translation point; land our bread; land our prayer; land the blanket of the ancestors; and land the transport. The land itself is seen as both text and hermeneutic; it may be read, and participates in a divine-human translation of its own. Mazamisa's statement, 'Land *ubuntufies* God,' raises the question of the relationship between the transcendence and the immanence of God from within the struggle for ancestral land in South Africa. He sees land as playing the translative role in the incarnation of God - the bringing of God down to earth as Emmanuel: God with us. His concluding statement, 'For people, God needs ground to stand on,' must be read in the light of centuries of Western Christian theology which so spiritualised God and the bible that God remained not only a 'sky God', but one who was disinterested in the earthly oppression and suffering of black South Africans. This heavenly-biased theology was experienced as theological propaganda, a theo-ganda if you will, by the dispossessed - as part of the repressive mechanism which sought to create and maintain a mentally-colonised state of acquiescence. Thus the importance of a grounded God, and, moreover, the importance of a God grounded in Africa among Africans speaking the language(s) of Africa.

Many and various questions arise at this point. What are the implications of land as the *ubuntufication* of God for the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ?<sup>47</sup> Are we seeing in Mazamisa's theological assertion that 'land *ubuntufies* God' a grounding of Christology, a grounding of the 'word made flesh', or does Mazamisa's reference to the 'God of Israel' point more in the direction of the Hebrew Testament? What dialogue may be had between the tradition of Mary as the mother of Jesus Christ and the tradition of the land as mother in the context of Mazamisa's discourse? Further, does a commodificatory conception of land, and the unjust ownership patterns on the land resulting from the violent and impoverishing dispossession of its original inhabitants, thus strike at the very incarnation of God on earth? The statement, 'Land is prayer as well as the answer to prayer. Whoever removes land from someone interferes with God's answer to people's prayers,' points to a relational theological ethics that involves God, land and people in a vital and sacred continuum, the rupture of

<sup>40</sup> Welile Mazamisa, unpublished speech, University of the Western Cape, 22 April, 1994 (italics mine).

<sup>47</sup> An intriguing reference to Christ as 'a son of the soil' appears in Archbishop Desmond Tutu's address on the occasion of the funeral of Chris Hani on 19 April, 1993. 'We have come to bury a great son of the soil,' said Tutu, referring expectedly to Hani. Unexpectedly, he then went on to include Christ with Chris as a son of the soil, with the distinction that Christ is named as a son of *the* soil, and Chris as a son of *our* soil: 'Is there anyone here who doubts that Christ was a great son of the soil? ('No.') I don't hear you. (No!') Is there anyone here who doubts that Chris was a great son of our soil? (No!')' (Tutu 1994: 245). One has the feeling that Mazamisa and Tutu would have much to talk about with respect to what a grounded Christology looks like.

which, if possible, may indeed be seen in an ancestral hermeneutics to strike at the very incarnation of God on earth.

Further questions arise. May God be grounded in the same way throughout the world? Is there a danger in ancestral hermeneutics of a particular ancestry or genealogy narrowing the focus of theological hermeneutics in a way that risks a multiplicity of mutually-exclusive territorial theological discourses?<sup>48</sup> Again, given the patriarchy inherent in ancestral tradition, what are the implications for women's liberation and empowerment of an ancestral hermeneutics? What can be said at this point is that an ancestral hermeneutics must be a critical hermeneutics for its liberative and transformative potentialities to be realised by all. Clearly, Mazamisa has given us a searching articulation of an empowering spirituality wherein God, land and people are intimately related in soul and substance, with land as the medium of the relationality.

Mazamisa's observation that ancestral hermeneutics, central as it is in people's lives on the land and in their own struggles for it, is not always articulated in political discourse, returns us to Itumeleng Mosala's point noted above: there is a need for a mutual interrogation of the cultural, historical and political in black struggles for land. Further, as is evident from the praxis and discourse of landless communities themselves, a movement toward such a mutual interrogation on the way to a critical ancestral hermeneutics is already underway on the ground. Conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses, Mazamisa not only points us in the direction of a grounded theology of land, he plants us in it:

Land is theology. It is the blanket that covers the nakedness of the ancestors and incarnates their soul. It provides the basis and context of *ubuntu-botho*. Mosoma is right when he states that 'for black people, the struggle is not based on some formal abstract principles. It is essentially expressed and concretised in land ... To be sure, without land restitution the conditions necessary for the actualisation of a just, democratic social and political order cannot be attained' (Mazamisa in Villa-Vincencio and De Gruchy, eds., 1994: 215).

Mazamisa's reference to the work of David Mosoma provides a useful point of transition. Mosoma, in a penetrating and comprehensive article entitled, 'Justice, Peace, Reparation and Restitution,' in the Land Issue of the *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa* (1991), displays an approach that is very much in resonance with that of the TLRC communities by locating a conjunction of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses at the grave site of the ancestors. Further, Mosoma explores the 'split personality syndrom of black humanity' effected by apartheid and alienation from the land. One of the

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Buti Thlagali, 'Rites, Ancestors and Christian Faith,' *Challenge* 26, 1994, pp.8-10. See also H. Brichto, 'Kin, Cult, Land and Afterlife - A Biblical Complex,' *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44, 1973, 1-54.

overwhelming motivations behind the uncompromising drive for land restitution is thus seen by Mosoma to be the healing of the Black African personality, following the schizophrenia produced by the uprooting and alienating praxis and discourse of apartheid:

Their alienation from the land contributed immensely to the black people's low self-image. The Bible says, '...if anyone is in Christ, he [she] is a new creation, the old has passed away, behold, the new has come' (1 Cor. 5:17). Black people find it difficult to experience the new-creaturely reality that the Gospel promises because of the political and social deformation and truncation of their humanity. Consequently, the split personality syndrome of black humanity today is the product of the political uprooting and alienation praxis of apartheid - alienation from land, religion and ancestral fellowship. In African Traditional Religion there exists a close connection between the living and the 'living dead', the ancestors. Active communication takes place between them. The reverence of the ancestors is linked with a degree of land reverence. Ali Mazrui writes, 'The mystique of land reverence in Africa is partly a compact between the living, the dead and the unborn. Where the ancestors are buried, there the soul of the clan resides, and there the prospects of health of the next generations should be sought.' He underscores the view that all life is marked by the relationship between the people and their land. But perhaps this striking relationship is most pronounced in the end of life, that is, death. The burial of the communities' ancestors in the land is a sacred act that completes the bond between people and the land. The lives of their ancestors continue to sustain life for those who dwell in the ancestral land.<sup>49</sup>

Mosoma's analysis of forced removals as having broken vital ties, visible and invisible, between the people and the land is corroborated time and again in the discourse of the TLRC communities. The image of being *uprooted* recurs frequently: the violence done was both material and spiritual, and that in an integral way, such that to physically remove a community was at the same time to spiritually alienate them from their community and communication with their ancestors, thus breaking their health, unto death in many cases.<sup>50</sup> The resulting poverty was thus both physical and spiritual, or, in Engelbert Mveng's anguished analysis, the poverty is 'anthropological, structural and evangelical'.<sup>51</sup> Mosoma quotes 'a grandmother' who had seen her shack demolished in Cape Town and suffered removal to a remote resettlement camp as saying, 'They have taken our land; they have taken our God.' He then asserts with courageous transparency that: 'Landlessness renders an African politically

<sup>49</sup> David Mosoma, *JBTS-A*, Vol 5:2, November 1991, p21. Significantly, for the dialogue of Black African and Womanist hermeneutics, the '[she]' is Mosoma's.

<sup>50</sup> A case in point is that of the Riemvaasmaak community in Namaqualand. Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, who served on the (Advisory) Commission on Land Allocation, an ambiguous body created by F.W. De Klerk at the time of the repeal of the land laws, relates the story of a member of the community who testified that her parents died soon after removal. She was in no doubt that it was the relocation, physical and spiritual, that killed them. 'She wept bitter tears,' recalls Ntongana (Interview with T.W. Ntongana, Jabulani, Soweto, 17 December, 1993, unpublished, p.5).

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Engelbert Mveng, 'Impoverishment and Liberation: A Theological Approach for Africa and the Third World,' in R. Gibellini, ed., *Paths of African Theology*, London, 1994, pp.154-165. Mveng discusses anthropological, structural and evangelical poverty in his searching critique of the conceptualisation of poverty in Western analyses. See the discussion below in the final chapter.

impotent and spiritually bankrupt, hence the problem of the split personality' (1991:21). For Africans, as well as for indigenous peoples throughout the world, 'history and identity are rooted in land.'<sup>52</sup> The rooting of identity and history in land is a crucial aspect of the grounded hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, and the comparative cases to which Mosoma refers are indeed indicative of the wider hermeneutical context in which an ancestral hermeneutics in South Africa may be appreciated. Mosoma quotes from a statement that emerged from a WCC workshop on 'Race and Minority Issues' in 1978:

To the indigenous people ... land is life. We affirm that land is integrally part of individual, family and community life ... The history and identity of our people are intimately bound up with the land, and therefore our history and self-understanding become meaningful only when they are related to our land. Land is the primary means of our continuity as a people, and it connects our past with the present and it is the hope of our future.<sup>53</sup>

Exploring the indigenous view of land as gift,<sup>54</sup> Mosoma finds that the sacredness and religious valuation of land has strong resonance for black South Africans and is to be seen in the people's sense and experience of an intimate relatedness to the land. It is for this reason, argues Mosoma, that disputes over land restitution have both moral and theological dimensions - dimensions which generally go unrecognised or undervalued in debates that overvalue a commodificatory view of land. 'Justice for the poor is measured in terms of how the land is valued, because for them land is life. That is, for them land and justice are closely yoked together.' Thus it is that, 'Justice among the Africans is embodied in land repossession ... the actualisation of liberation should be embodied in land repossession' (1991:22). For this reason, argues Mosoma, to abandon land restitution is to abandon both the spiritual and physical dimensions of the liberation struggle itself:

When people are aliens and land-less in the land of their birth, the shape of God's future for

<sup>52</sup>The literature available on the spirituality and struggles of first peoples throughout the world for land is now huge, reflecting the resurgence of activism in their struggles and a heightened sense of responsibility, interdependence and solidarity in the West. The World Council of Churches has played a leading role in publishing the testimony, narration, spirituality, analysis and praxis of the struggles of first peoples for their land. Cf. *Land Rights for Indigenous People*, PCR Information 16, Geneva, 1983; *Land is Our Life*, PCR Information 25, Geneva, 1989; Geneva; Anne Patel-Gray, *Through Aboriginal Eyes: The Cry from the Wilderness*, Geneva, 1991; *Stories of the Land: WCC Teamvisit to Australia*, Geneva, 1993. A strikingly graphic corroboration of Mosoma's argument comes in the witness of David Mowaljarlai, quoted by Anne Patel-Gray in her discussion of Aboriginal struggles for land rights in Australia: 'Disturbing sacred sites and land is agony for our people. Land and mountains and spring water - the heart of the sacred sites - is really our body. Grader, bulldozer are pressing down on our body, liver, kidney bleeding. Graders are scraping the skin off our flesh - a sore that will not heal up: in my language, *wilu*, killing us' (Patel-Gray, 1991: 35).

<sup>53</sup> Document No 126, 1978/79:7, in Mosoma, *ibid.*, pp.21-22.

<sup>54</sup> Mosoma's statement is: 'The question as to whether or not the land is a gift is non-negotiable for indigenous people.' The observation suggests that an indigenous and African dialogue with the Hebrew Bible's tradition of land as gift would be a useful exercise. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *op cit*, pp. 45ff, and see the discussion of biblical hermeneutics in the TLRC communities in chapters 5 and 6.



them and their land is uncertain. In the midst of uncertainty, they cannot easily discern what the future will bring. It is the land held in trust, for the living, the dead and for the yet unborn. The continuity between the past and present, between life and death, depends on the primary category of space understood as land (1991:22).

The linkages between God, land and people are seen to be essential, even determinative, for life. Mosoma's clear statement of a genealogical view of time as human time, wherein past, present and future are spoken of in terms of the ancestors, current generations and children to come, is a common feature throughout rural communities and plays a major role in how a grounded hermeneutics works in a context of transition. Further, his inter-generational approach to trust and land, wherein current generations hold the land in trust for 'the living, dead and yet unborn' is significant in light of the false and dispossessive use of the term 'trust' in legislative tools like the 'Natives Trust and Land Act' of 1936 - a point to which we will return in chapter 4.

Employing a Black African hermeneutic, Mosoma speaks of the 'onto-genetic' understanding of humanity in matters of land restitution:

The onto-genetic understanding of humanity, particularly its emphasis on human relations, is central to the African conception of justice and has significant implications for land restitution. The onto-genetic idea is based on the African central dictum that says: *motho ke motho ka ba bangwe batho*, meaning one's humanity is defined, complemented and enhanced by the humanity of others. That is to say, mutual aid is a moral obligation (1991:22).<sup>55</sup>

We have already encountered the relationality of the 'onto-genetic' in Mazamisa's emphasis on *ubuntufication*; *ubuntu-botho* may be said to be an essential aspect of the hermeneutical context of a grounded hermeneutics. From the papers of the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa to the stories of Ellen Kuzwayo in *Sit Down and Listen*,<sup>56</sup> *ubuntu-botho* has featured in the discourse of black South Africans with respect to being, resistance, restitution and restoration. In an interview in her home in Alexandra, Mam Patience Pashe, National Co-Chairperson of Women for Peace, spoke of *ubuntu-botho* as the nucleus of a set of values including relationality, compassion and sharing. In Sotho the words *kamohelo* (welcome, hospitality), *kopano* (meeting, communion) and *tsebedisano-'moho* (working together, co-operation) were emphasised, as was a searching

<sup>55</sup> Mosoma goes on to quote John Mbiti's famous reworking of the Cartesian *cogito* as further indication of the interdependence of human beings: 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (Mbiti 1970:141).

<sup>56</sup> See Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge - Report for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa*, Cape Town, 1989, pp.267-273; and Ellen Kuzwayo, *Sit Down and Listen*, Cape Town, 1990, pp.111-123.



connection between ubuntu-botho and 'real Christianity', wherein *ubuntu* is primary and inclusive:

*Ubuntu* is inside us all - black and white. Some say *ubuntu* is only within black people, but I think it is common to all. Not only black ... When you look at *ubuntu*, that is where real Christianity comes from. *Ubuntu* was here within us long before Christianity came. Looking after your neighbour. Sharing with those in need. *Ubuntu* is Christianity itself. It shows there is good in humans ... Unfortunately, we have left aside many of our very good traditions. It is there that you can see the hand of the devil ... So I don't believe black people were heathens! No! Through *ubuntu* people lived the commandments of the Lord. *Ubuntu* was not written. It is an unwritten code. Within everyone.<sup>57</sup>

For Mosoma, 'the issue of reciprocal human life and interdependence of our common humanity' provides nothing less than 'a new basis for doing theology and politics' (1991:22). Citing a specific example, Mosoma refers to *Mafisa*, a cultural practice which mandated individuals and the community as a whole to provide basic material means to the poor and strangers within the community to enable them to start a new life. Depending on the needs of the individual, the community provided either a cow for milk or a piece of land to cultivate. 'This was not a form of charity,' asserts Mosoma, 'The community aimed at creating the conditions in which the poor could attain material independence rather than always being objects of humiliating charity':

This African cultural practice helped to safeguard the poor and strangers against perpetual poverty ... (they) were given material self-defense not only against poverty, but also against humiliation and degradation. The acquisition of and accessibility to land was one of the practical ways by which the community ensured that the poor were empowered against poverty. According to African moral thought, depriving people of access to land is morally untenable, as this would render them less human (1991:23).

The significance of the African moral tradition for land restitution, argues Mosoma, is that 'it can serve as the basis for a genuine reconciliation with justice, expressing the inextricable connection of liberated humanity and land' (1991:23). Making a detailed connection between *Mafisa* and the Jubilee tradition in the bible, Mosoma moves to his conclusion that for black South Africans the struggle for 'genuine peace and abounding justice is predicated on land restitution, which is an approximation of God's justice in an unjust country ... without land restitution the conditions necessary for the actualisation of a just democratic social and political order cannot be attained' (1991:27). A *critical ancestral hermeneutics* thus conjoins religio-cultural with socio-economic and political analyses in a

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Mam Patience Pashe, Alexandra, 28 December, 1993, unpublished, p.1.

grounded hermeneutics of land restitution, and may be seen as indispensable for a liberative and transformative praxis on the land.

#### 1.4 Concluding Summary

In the context of contested conceptualisations and spiritualities of land and land ownership, a grounded Black African hermeneutics of land, reading surface and subjacent texts, may thus be said to be: 1) multivalent in its scope and dynamic, employing religio-cultural, historical, socio-economic and political analyses in an intentional complementarity; 2) integral in its worldview, seeing no dichotomy between the spiritual and the material with respect to the land and struggles for land restitution; 3) inter-generational in its sense of community and time, linking past, present and future generations; 4) gender-inclusive, seeking the liberation and transformation of patriarchal consciousness and structures with respect to land and life; and 5) proceeds with a sense and experience of intimate relationality with respect to the reciprocal and interactive connections between God, people and land, wherein the land itself takes on personality, and is seen to be a *locus theologicus* as well as the medium in which the history and identity of the people is seen to be rooted.

## CHAPTER 2

### **The Graves of the Ancestors in Local Struggles for Land Restitution**

'The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return. Mayibuye!'

Back to the Land Campaign,  
25 June, 1993.

The declaration by rural land-less communities that the graves of their ancestors are their title deeds provides a distinct focus for one of the central issues in a grounded theology of land restitution: that of ancestral traditions concerning land and their significance for the struggles of land-less communities to regain their land and restore their lives on it. It is a statement which requires us to ask: what is ancestral about ancestral land claims, and in what ways are communities interpreting and employing their ancestral traditions in their struggles for land?

The three chapters which follow concern themselves with an exploration of ancestral traditions as evident in the discourse and praxis of rural communities engaged in struggles for the restoration of their land. They argue the multivalent integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution, comprehending the religio-cultural, historical-legal, and socio-economic and political aspects of the land struggles of the communities. In particular, following the lead of the communities, attention will be focused on the graves of the ancestors and their importance in local land struggles. This focus will in turn lead to a consideration of several emergent themes in the chapters that follow: textuality and title from below, narrativity and orality, *memoria passionis* and anamnestic solidarity, false fathers and the conflict of patriarchies; assumed 'trust' and corrupting co-optation, landlessness and poverty; white exclusivity and black inclusivity; *ubuntu-botho* and the holistic community of past, present and future generations; the relationships between *batho* (people), *badimo* (ancestors), and *Modimo* (God) in the areas of healing and warmth, peace and rain, bloodshed and drought, land and

prosperity: inter-traditionality (African, biblical and Western Christian); and the role of the *badimo* and *Modimo* in local struggles for land restitution.<sup>1</sup>

Extensive group interviews with land-less communities in the (former) Eastern, South-Eastern, Central and Western Transvaal (hereafter referred to as TLRC communities) concerning their theological reflections on their ongoing land struggles are a primary source for these chapters. Of particular significance are the returns to land of the Bakwena ba Mogopa and Bakubung ba Ratheo communities, and the attempted and partial returns of the Moletete and Barolong communities: the speeches, prayers and rituals which attended the returns of the Bakwena and the Bakubung in particular, and the formal celebrations (*mekete*) following their returns, comprise a rich source for a grounded theology of land restitution. Participant observation and group and individual interviews with community leaders and members provided both data and an internal interpretative commentary on the land struggles of the communities. Following a presentation of the primary material, of necessity selective, the analyses and theological reflections on this material by leaders of African Indigenous Churches,<sup>2</sup> and Black African and Prophetic theologians in South Africa will be engaged.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The custom of the burial of the umbilical cord and its importance for a sense of belonging to the land; the view of the soil as mother and its significance for ecological ethics; and the emphasis on children and the land claims of future generations will be discussed in chapter seven on women's *hermeneutics* and local land struggles.

<sup>2</sup> In particular, interviews with Archbishop T.W. Ntongana and Bishop Paul Makhubu of the Council of African Independent Churches (CAIC), and with Arch-Bishop N. H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng of the African Spiritual Churches Association (ASCA). ASCA is in the process, participative and, of necessity, lengthy, of writing and editing an introduction to the theology of their churches, to be used in the training of their leaders. In the meantime, the following two written works are indispensable: *Speaking for Ourselves: The Report of the African Independent Churches' Pilot Study on the History and Theology of their Churches*, published by the Order of Preachers (Southern Africa), ASCA and the Institute for Contextual Theology, Braamfontein, 1985; and Paul Makhubu, *Who Are the Independent Churches?*, Johannesburg, 1988. Participant observation and notes from speeches made at the Commemoration of the Bulhoek Massacre, Ntabelanga, Eastern Cape, 24 May, 1992, have also proved indispensable. It may be noted that several of those involved in the leadership of the Back to the Land Campaign are evangelists and preachers in Independent Churches, in their communities. This was most notable in the Moletete Community where fully five of the ten members of the vanguard re-occupying Van Niekerk's Oord in the Blyderivierspoort were ministers and evangelists in Independent or 'Mainline' churches: Petrus Makhubedu, minister of St Engenas Zion Christian Church; Laitos Malatjie and Laxon Mahlakoane, evangelists of the General Zion Apostolic Church; Enos Chiloane, evangelist of the Reformed Apostolic Faith Mission; and Abram Molobela, minister of the Baptist Church. Further, it may be noted that the terms 'independent', 'indigenous', and 'mainline' are used with some degree of dissatisfaction; the search continues for an ecclesiological terminology which will facilitate dialogue rather than preserve division.

<sup>3</sup> I first saw the term 'Black African' in the writings of Josiah Young, an African-American theologian who has been moving in the direction of a Pan-African Theology, embracing and dialoguing with both African and Black theological traditions. See his *Black and African Theologies: Siblings or Distant Cousins?*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1986; *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors*, Trenton, N.J., 1992; and *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, London, 1993. The term 'Prophetic Theology' is used with primary reference to the *Kairos Document* (1985; second edition, 1986), wherein 'prophetic theology' is distinguished from both 'state theology' and 'church theology' by a primary and praxiological commitment to the liberation and empowerment of the poor and oppressed. While the terms 'Black African' and 'Prophetic' may not, for a complex of reasons including ideology, personality, cultural identity, and socio-economic location, simply be lumped together in the South African context, they may be seen when viewed from the ground as being theologically compatible. This recognition points to the potential of local theologising to bring together theologians who, at the professional level (academic and pastoral), are marked as much by political and

It will be evident already that an inclusive approach has been taken with respect to what may be called 'theological': reflection within the communities on both African ancestral traditions and biblical traditions concerning land, and on the interaction between the two, from male and female points of view, have been taken as being theological in nature - an approach which embraces the inter-traditionality characteristic of much of the theologising in rural communities. It is to an exploration of the significance of the graves of the ancestors that we now turn.

## **2.1 Ancestral Hermeneutics and In(ter)culturation**

The question asked at the beginning of this chapter, 'What is ancestral about ancestral land claims?' brings together religio-cultural, historical-legal, socio-economic and political aspects of the land struggles of rural communities. This being the case, they must be asked in a way that does not reproduce the dichotomy, false in the view of the communities themselves, between the 'spiritual' and the 'material' aspects of their struggle for land and for life on the land. In the TLRC communities there is an integral relation between what would in the dominant tradition in the West be seen as the spiritual and the material aspects of rural land struggles; this integrality is central to rural land struggles, and must therefore be seen to lie at the heart of a grounded approach to a theology of land restitution. While the conceptual distinctions which characterise Western thinking concerning the spiritual and the material are acknowledged and at times employed strategically by land-less communities, it may be said that, in spite of three and a half centuries of assaultive European presence in South Africa, including the converse influence of Western Christianity, there is no estrangement of what we may for heuristic purposes call the religio-cultural aspects from the socio-economic and political aspects of local theologies of land restitution. There is, therefore, a need for a holistic hermeneutic that recognises the 'complementarity of religio-cultural and social analyses.'<sup>4</sup>

The integrality of local praxis concerning land points to an enduring, though not impervious, integrity of tradition lying subjacent to the more differentiated surface - literally so in the case of the graves of the ancestors. Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, President of the Council of African Independent Churches, responding to a question concerning the differences he sees between African and Western spiritualities concerning the land, affirms, 'When it comes to

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ecclesiological division as they are by unity. A local approach, marked by multivalent integrality and inter-traditionality, has much to recommend it with respect to facilitating the praxis of liberation and transformation theology.

<sup>4</sup> Josiah Young, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors*, Trenton, N.J., 1992, p.181.



land we Africans do not divorce the physical from the spiritual. If you touch one you touch the other.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Peter Kasenene argues that while the 'traditional ethos' of Africa has been undermined and disrupted by Western and Eastern influences, producing a 'matrix of heterogeneity' and divergent subcultures, it has nonetheless survived. Defining this traditional ethos, however, is now 'not a simple exercise,' and Kasenene accordingly warns theologians against a simple excavation or resuscitation of the past. This warning sounded, he then highlights the enduring 'deeply religious' nature of African ethics, and identifies three 'basic principles' around which African ethics are built: vitalism, communalism, and holism. While one may wish to debate the appropriateness of the use of the word 'principles' with respect to African tradition, wishing instead to foreground a more narrative rationality, each of the three areas discussed by Kasenene features significantly in the theological reflections of communities involved in the Back to the Land Campaign. His introduction of the last, holism, is particularly apposite at this point:

According to African spirituality, there is no dichotomy between the sacred and the profane, the physical and the spiritual, the religious and the moral. The African world-view blends the sacred and the mundane. The religious and the moral intermingle with the physical, material, political and social concerns of the people. African world-views emphasise the wholeness of life.<sup>6</sup>

Differently put, local theological reflection in rural land-less communities concerning the land, people, ancestors and God radically calls into question the putative dichotomy between Black and African theologies in South Africa. Instead, local rural theologising on land and land struggles underlines the inter-relatedness of liberation and inculturation traditions in Black and African theologies.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a critical appreciation of the liberative and empowering aspects of African culture for the economic and political struggle in South Africa has been

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, Jabulani, Soweto, 17 December, 1993, p.4. At the time of the interview Archbishop Ntongana was serving as a member of the Commission on Land Allocation which, in spite of its obvious limitations and the slowness of its pace, was a vehicle which he felt could and should be used by those communities which fit its (narrow) mandate. The Bakubung ba Ratheo did so successfully. The Commission has since given way to the new Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights established by the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22) of 1994.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Kasenene, 'Ethics in African Theology,' in C. Villa-Vincencio and J. De Gruchy, eds., *Doing Ethics in Context: South African Perspectives*, Cape Town, 1994, p.142. On the heterogeneity of African societies, see his discussion on p.138.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Emmanuel Martey, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1993, for a well-argued presentation of the complementarity of African and Black theology in Africa in general, and Takatso Mofokeng, ed., *Journal of Black Theology in South Africa: Land Issue Edition*, 5:2, 1991, with respect to Black African theologising from within land struggles in South Africa. The articles by Siggibo Dwane, 'Theology and the Land Question,' and David Mosoma, 'Justice, Peace, Reparation and Restitution,' are especially important for an understanding of the complementarity of inculturation and liberation hermeneutics in Black African theologising on the land struggles of their people in South Africa.

present from the beginning of Black Theology in the late 1960s and early 1970s,<sup>8</sup> and is again receiving serious attention as evidenced in the proceedings of the National Ecumenical Consultation on Christianity, African Culture and Development in Southern Africa, held at Telkom College, 9-12 August, 1994.<sup>9</sup> The report of the consultation states in its 'Issues Raised' section that, 'Reclaiming the rich African heritage (is) an essential element for reconstruction and development as well as (for) the affirmation of the dignity of all the people of Southern Africa.' The official statement issued at the end of the consultation underlines the inter-relatedness of political, economic and religio-cultural themes for theology in a new South Africa:

Having met as an ecumenical body to begin a process of examining the relationship between African Culture and Christianity, and its implication for Christian praxis in a changing Southern Africa, we recognise that: ... A new beginning aimed at human development and economic affirmation needs to involve a process of healing and cleansing; ... The rediscovery of basic human creativity and communality through our African heritage is essential for economic, political and social empowerment in a new Southern Africa.<sup>10</sup>

Further, the multivalent integrality of local theologising about land has a significant contribution to make to the shaping of culture and of ways of thinking about culture in the new South Africa. Dynamic processes of in(ter)culturation, both consonant and dissonant, have been underway for centuries in South Africa; the new moment, a *kairos*, presents us with an opportunity to make these processes more dialogical and mutually beneficial, seeking not to subsume or homologise identity and difference but reciprocally to communicate and explore together new ways of being South African.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Motlhabi, Mokgethi. *Essays on Black Theology*, published by the Black Theology Project of the University Christian Movement, Johannesburg, 1972. This volume of essays was immediately banned in South Africa, and a version of the collection, including essays by the original editors - Sabelo Ntwasa, who had been banned before publication in Johannesburg, and Basil Moore, who edited the international edition - appeared two years later as *The Challenge of Black Theology in South Africa*, Atlanta, 1974. In 1986 a second collection of essays, intentionally in continuity with the 1972 collection, was published by the Institute of Contextual Theology under the title, *The Unquestionable Right to Be Free: Black Theology from South Africa* (Skotaville, Braamfontein; and Orbis, Maryknoll). Edited by Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhagale, the essays cover a wider scope than the first collection, notably the perspective of women as black theologians. The significance of African religio-cultural traditions for Black Theology in South Africa is argued by Mokgethi Motlhabi in, 'The Historical Origins of Black Theology'; J.B. Ngubane in 'Theological Roots of the African Independent Churches and their Challenge to Black Theology'; and Itumeleng Mosala, 'The Relevance of African Traditional religions and their Challenge to Black Theology.' See also Hans-Jürgen Becken, ed., *Relevant Theology for Africa: Report on a Consultation of the Missiological Institute at Lutheran Theological College, Mapumulo, Natal, September 12-21, 1972*, Durban, 1973. The papers of Manas Buthelezi, DDL Makhathini, SP Lediga, Desmond Tutu, EK Mosothoane, and David Bosch in particular, and the 'diary of the consultation' by Becken, offer deep insights into the interrelatedness of culture and liberation in the origins of Black theology in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. The Report of the National Ecumenical Consultation on Christianity, African Culture and Development, Telkom College, 9-12 August, 1994, in *Challenge*, 27, December, 1994, pp.20-21. See also Barney Pitso, 'Culture as Evangelisation,' in *Presentations to the National Conference of the South African Council of Churches, 1994*, Johannesburg, 1994, pp.11-22.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, sections 5.4 and 5.5, p.21.

## 2.2 The Graves of the Ancestors as a Locus Theologicus

As noted, the multivalent integrality of rural struggles for land restitution is signalled in the text of the *Memorandum to the Multi-Party Negotiators from Rural Communities Seeking Restoration of their Land*, dated June 25, 1993. The *Memorandum*, in which the 'graves of our ancestors' statement forms the final sentence, was presented to the multi-party negotiators of the Interim Constitution at Kempton Park by a delegation of more than 100 representatives from 60 of the Transvaal-based communities of the BLC.<sup>11</sup> Received by senior members of the negotiating teams of the ANC and NP, it made several demands: the restoration of ancestral land to communities forcibly removed under apartheid; land rights for farm workers and labour tenants - male and female; a commitment to land restitution on the part of the multi-party forum before a final constitution was drawn up; consultation with all affected communities and organisations before a new land policy was established; a moratorium on the sale of state land to private interests; and the establishment of a Land Claims Court to replace the state's 'slow, unrepresentative and toothless' Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA). It concluded with the declaration that failure to meet the 'minimum' demand of land restoration would result in communities re-occupying their lands outright.

The graves of the ancestors are mentioned twice in the *Memorandum*, once in the opening paragraph where land restoration is demanded, and again in the closing paragraph where re-occupation is asserted. The opening paragraph, together with a one-sentence preamble, reads as follows:

We, the representatives of rural communities, who have borne the brunt of apartheid land policies, demand our right to the land.

### **Back to our land! Land for the Land-less!**

We demand that the land of those who were forcibly removed by the apartheid government be returned immediately. This is not a demand for land reform, it is simply a demand for restoration, of the undoing of one of the worst wrongs of apartheid, for a levelling of the playing field. *We demand that we are allowed to return to the graves of our ancestors, as our traditions call us to do. No other land can be compensation for what we lost* (italics mine).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *Back to the Land Campaign Info Packet*, compiled by the National Land Committee, Media and Resources Department, August, 1993, pp.B2-4. Indicative of the conflict of patriarchies involved in ancestral claims to land, to be discussed below, the right-wing Afrikaner Resistance Movement (Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging, AWB), in a violently intimidatory demonstration, used an armoured vehicle to crash its way into the World Trade Centre on the same day, 25 June, 1993, occupying it briefly, threatening to shoot all 'kaffirs' present, looting the delegates bar, urinating on desks, and demanding an independent Afrikaner *Volkstaat*, stopping only for a brief prayer over the loudspeaker in the middle of the mayhem before running riot once more in their 'thuggish' Christian crusade against the *swart/rooi gevaar*. Cf. Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution*, Sandton, 1994, pp.190-92.

The concluding paragraph reads as follows:

**Reoccupation is the alternative.**

The rural people of our land are known for their patience. However, our patience is not endless. If the negotiators do not address at least the minimum demand of restoration urgently, the only course of action left to our communities is to return to our land. *Let them remove us again: we would rather die on our land than to live away from it! The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return* (italics mine). MAYIBUYE!

Because of its clarity, passion and timing, to say nothing of the validity of its claims, the *Memorandum* was instrumental, in concert with a wide alliance of players as noted in the introduction, in securing a commitment from the negotiators that the principle of restitution of land rights would be included among the 'constitutional principles' which would guide the drafting of a new constitution following the April 1994 elections.<sup>12</sup>

The statement, 'The graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return,' is both paradigmatic and programmatic with respect to the Back to the Land Campaign of rural communities, and as such provides a useful point of departure for analysis. It may be seen as having three sections: 1) 'The graves of our ancestors,' 2) 'are our title deeds,' and 3) 'and we will return.' These sections may be characterised, but not dichotomised, as follows: 1) religious-cultural, familial; 2) historical, legal, economic and political; and 3) practical and strategic. Further, the concluding 'Mayibuye!', a communal call for Africa to come back to her people and to herself, may be seen as a participative and integrating summary of the *Memorandum* as a whole. The 'Mayibuye!', which shouts from the page, would immediately be answered with a spirited 'iAfrika!'; 'iAfrika!' to be shouted a second time and answered in turn by

<sup>12</sup> The multi-party negotiating forum, formally known as CODESA, Convention for a Democratic South Africa, produced a Constitution (Act No. 200 of 1993), a draft Bill of Rights, and a canon of Constitutional Principles, enshrined in the Constitution (1993), to which the post-election Constitutional Assembly was bound in its debates on the way to a permanent constitution for the new South Africa. Section 121 (1) of the Constitution (1993) required that 'an Act of Parliament shall provide for the restitution of land rights of a person or community dispossessed under or for the purpose of furthering the objects of any racially based discriminatory law.' The World Trade Centre became in 1993 a site of struggle both within and without the formal, multi-party negotiating process, with conflicting groups and interests seeking to influence proceedings in various ways. As noted, the right-wing Afrikaner *Weerstandsbeweging* (AWB) crashed its way into the WTC on June 25, 1993, occupying it for a day and interrupting, but not derailing, the negotiation process. The Back to the Land Campaign followed its June demonstration with a second and larger demonstration at the WTC in August, 1993, organised to protest against the inclusion of a private property clause in the proposed Bill of Rights. In contrast to the violence of the AWB break-in in June, the 500 representatives from more than 100 land-less communities from across South Africa demonstrated peacefully for the property clause be dropped, asserting that property rights were too important to be rushed through an 'inaccessible' negotiations process, and that the matter should be dealt with only after the elections. Their placards reiterated the demands included in their June *Memorandum*: 'Re kgutlela lefatseng la rona! We are going back to our land'; 'Land for All'; 'De Klerk stop selling our land'; 'No land, no rural vote'. See National Land Committee, *Land Update* 26, September, 1993, pp.4-5.



'Mayibuye!', completing one of the unifying and mobilising a-b-b-a chants of the black struggle in South Africa.

It was during the pivotal months which preceded and immediately followed the April 1994 elections that I did the balance of the research with the TLRC communities. I raised the issue in the same way in each community, quoting the words, their own, of the *Memorandum*, and asking: Who are the ancestors? What is the significance of their graves? In what way or ways do you view their graves to be title deeds in your struggle for your land? Following the initial group interviews, further questions were asked: What ongoing communication do you have with your ancestors, and what role have they played in your land struggles? What is the relationship between the ancestors (*badimo*) and God (*Modimo*)? What role has God played in your land struggles? These questions elicited hours of response in each community in the form of explanation, narration, speech-act, song, poetry, prayer, analysis and polemic. The following presentation seeks to convey as faithfully as possible the responses of those involved in the research, foregrounding the voices of community members in extended quotations and dialogical excerpts taken from the interviews, theological hearings and bible studies. Where necessary or desirable for depth and nuance of meaning, I have included the *ipsissima verba* of the community members in their first languages, otherwise the presentation is of the *ipsissima vox*, as translated during and/or following the interviews.<sup>13</sup>

Already in the first group interview (with members of the Moletete Community in the Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, 3 February 1994) it became clear that there were two ways, integrally related, in which the graves of the ancestors were being seen in the communities as title deeds, both of which are important for a theological ethics of land restitution. The *first* approach, more Western in provenance, focuses on the gravestones as *texts*, the existence of which in the landscape and inscriptions upon which where present comprise primary evidence in their ancestral claims. The texts in stone, of multivalent significance - historical, legal, familial and communal, economic and political - are seen as providing a counter-documentation from below, challenging the texts on paper in the Pretoria Deeds Office. As indicated above, however, a textual reading is necessary but not sufficient for a holistic understanding of the significance of the graves of the ancestors in the land struggles of rural

<sup>13</sup> The languages spoken in the group interviews covered a broad range (Setswana, Sesotho, Sepedi, Sepulana, Seroka, Zulu, Xhosa, Nharo, Afrikaans and English), with some participants speaking more than one language during the course of an interview. Translations were made both during interviews (where I did not know the language(s) spoken, e.g. Zulu, Afrikaans, Seroka, Sepulana, Nharo) and afterwards from the tapes, checking and sometimes debating meanings and connotations with research assistants whose first languages include those of the interviews. The question of language, translation and interpretation is of crucial importance in a grounded approach to theology, as noted in the introduction.



communities. A more overtly ancestral hermeneutic is called for. Thus, the *second* approach, more African in provenance, focuses on the gravestones as marking a *place of community and communication with the ancestors (badimo) and with God (Modimo)*. More religio-cultural in nature, this way of 'reading' the significance of the gravestones foregrounds the ongoing involvement of the *badimo* in the life of the community, their mediatorial role with respect to *Modimo*, and their joint importance in the community's struggle for the restoration of its ancestral land.<sup>14</sup>

These two ways of interpreting the significance of the graves were interwoven in the discourse and practice of the communities and as such resist analytic dissection. The speeches, prayers, and rituals of the *mekete*, group interviews and hearings are thus better approached through a contrapuntal reading, more commensurable with the integral nature of the communities' theologising. Focusing on the graves as a *locus theologicus*, and moving back and forth between the historical-legal, socio-economic and political, and the religio-cultural aspects thereof, I will argue the central thesis of a grounded theology of land restitution, with reference to emergent themes (Black African and Prophetic) in this theology. The balance of this chapter will focus on an ancestral reading of the textuality of the graves; chapter three will explore in more detail the religio-(inter)cultural question of the relation between *borapedi* (piety, spirituality) and praxis in the land struggles of the TLRC communities, and chapter four will present and critique the conflict of patriarchies inherent in struggles for ancestral land.

## 2.3 Ancestral Hermeneutics and the Textuality of the Graves

### 2.3.1 An Ancestral Reading of Textuality and Title

The need for an ancestral reading of textuality and title was emphasised in an early interview with Rev Othniel Pasha, then Director of the Botshabelo Trust and Chairperson of the Transvaal Land Restoration Committee. Responding to the *Memorandum of Land-less Communities*, he stated:

<sup>14</sup> The role of *Modimo* raises the question of who and/or what *Modimo* is, for there are African traditional, biblical, and traditio-biblical/biblico-traditional approaches in the communities with respect to experiencing, knowing and articulating the identity and role of *Modimo*. The discussion of *Modimo* from a local perspective has great potential to shed light on what has been an important, if often neglected, theological debate in Southern Africa. The distinction between *Modimo* (Supreme Being, Source, One Who Permeates All) and the *badimo* (ancestral spirits) is of key importance in recognising that the veneration of the *badimo* does *not* constitute, nor does it imply, ancestral worship - a point made repeatedly in the discourse of the communities. Cf. Gabriel Setiloane, *The Image of God Among the Sotho-Tswana*, Rotterdam, 1976; *African Theology: An*

After 1913, though blacks had land, they were not allowed to own land or purchase land. So, to show that they did own the land, they pointed to the graves as title deeds. To prove that from time A to time B this man lived here. He had a wife and children who also lived here. The gravestones were their record - having been denied the right to own land as whites did, with registered title deeds.

The government knew that the people were not allowed to own land, so when they asked them for title deeds they thought they had them. But they were wrong. The graves are title deeds. The texts on the graves are literally the documentation. You have the names of the man and his wife. Dates of birth. Dates of death. Names of their children. Name of the person who made the gravestone. The whole history is written there. On stone, not paper.

Parents show their children and children's children the graves and tell the story. That is why the fight for the land will never end. It will go on until the grandchildren or the great grandchildren have it back.<sup>15</sup>

For Othniel Pasha the title deeds of the Back to the Land communities are written in stone, and are seen as an historical-legal counter to land titles written on paper and registered in the Pretoria Deeds Office. In this connection, and with reference to the ancestral readings of textuality and title which follow, it is useful to note that great irony attends the term 'paper title' from a legal point of view. *Black's Law Dictionary* defines a paper title as, 'A title to land evidenced by a conveyance or a chain of conveyances; the term generally implying that such title, while it has colour or plausibility, is *without* substantial validity.'<sup>16</sup> Aninka Claassens, tracing the paper trail in South Africa on behalf of land-less communities, testifies:

Once the land was acquired by the colonial state or the colonial company it was granted to loyal European citizens. The Davenport and Hunt documents [1974] describe the process whereby grants, quitrents and loan farms were transformed into freehold title. In the course of my work I fairly often visit the Pretoria Deeds Office to check the history of pieces of land which African people have occupied since time immemorial, because they remain dissatisfied about how the nominal white 'owners' first acquired it. Time and again we trace the transactions of sale, inheritance and insolvency back to an initial grant from the then government. And so the first title deeds spring fully clothed into the deeds registry. Where they come from is not recorded, only that they come via the colonial government or a Boer republic [the Orange Free State or the South African Republic].<sup>17</sup>

It is to an ancestral reading of textuality and title that we now turn, beginning with the critique of paper title and assertion of ancestral title of the Moletele Community of the Eastern Transvaal Lowveld (now part of Northern Province).

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*Introduction*, Johannesburg, 1986; and Paul Makhubu, *Who Are the Independent Churches?*, Johannesburg, 1988. This question will be taken up in detail in chapter three.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Rev Othniel Pasha, Auckland House, Braamfontein, 18 January, 1994, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Campbell Black, *Black's Law Dictionary*, Fifth Edition, J. Nolan and J. Connolly, principal authors, St Paul, Minn., 1979, p.1332 (italics mine). On the 'colour' of title, see below.

<sup>17</sup> Aninka Claassens, 'For whites only - land ownership in South Africa,' in Michael de Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, IDASA, Cape Town, 1991, p.46. For the 'Davenport and Hunt documents', see TRH Davenport and J Hunt, eds., *The Right to the Land*, Cape Town, 1974.

### 2.3.1.1 The Moletete: An Ancestral Critique of Paper Title<sup>18</sup>

The Moletete Community were forcibly removed from their ancestral land in the Blyde River Canyon in the Eastern Transvaal in the mid 1960s to make way for the Blyderivierspoort Dam and surrounding Nature Reserve. Following an initial narration and discussion of the removal, the interview turned to a consideration of the graves of the ancestors in terms of the two statements made in the communities' *Memorandum* of 25 June, 1993. The question, 'Can you tell me about the ancestors, their graves, and how you see the graves as title deeds?' elicited the following responses:

**Petrus Makhubedu:** Yes, according to the statement, it shows that we black people were not allowed to buy land. So, to prove that it was our residential land, we have the graves of our ancestors.

**Barnas Mashego:** In other words, it shows that our title deeds are the gravestones. They are the things that show it is our ancestral land. To prove it is our ancestral land we have to show when we lived there. There is no other proof except the graves. There are no papers.

**Elphas Thete:** In other words, it shows that our original tradition is that the land belongs to us. Long ago. Even our great-grandfathers were there. The graves are the sign of this. We were removed from there without being told where we were going to be settled.<sup>19</sup>

Seeking clarification I asked, 'Is it the graves, or the graves together with the headstones that are important?' The following discussion ensued:

**Elphas Thete:** Some graves just have a pile of stones. Others have a proper gravestone with names and dates. In other areas, if we want to erect our tombstones on our graves, the whites deny us. They say erect the tombstones where you are residing now.

**Q:** The whites seem to be afraid of the tombstones being on the ancestral land.

**Elphas Thete:** Yes, they know how important they are. Like their papers.

**Q:** Do you see the writing on the tombstones as being more important than the writing on the paper deeds of the whites?

**Elphas Thete:** Yes -

**Petrus Makhubedu:** - In this way: because our forefathers were the people who did not have that knowledge concerning how to write a title deed, the graves of our ancestors - we have been told about them by our forefathers. They have not been written in books. Some of them we have seen for ourselves. When we visited the graves our father would tell us: your grandfather is buried there; your grandmother is buried there. They did not have a written proof. Even some graves did not have a tombstone with writing.

It is only us, the next generations, who are able to write. But unfortunately the whites were more educated than us, and they knew how to write. They were clever. They developed a shrewdness to sell among themselves the land which they had taken from us by force. After they had removed us, they then demarcated the land the way they wanted it. They wrote receipts to each other.

After that, from there, when we explained to them that we wanted to go back to the land from which we were forcibly removed to pray and venerate our ancestors, the whites refused us. We realised that these people were always going to refuse us. Some other

<sup>18</sup> The following speeches are taken from the Group Interview with Members of the Moletete and Setlhare Communities, Eastern Transvaal Central Lowveld, at the WITS Rural Facility, 3 February, 1994. The group interview with the vanguard leading the return of the Moletete to their land in the Blyde River Canyon three months later will feature more prominently in subsequent chapters.

<sup>19</sup> Moletete Group Interview, 3 February, 1994. p.4.

communities which managed to have some wealth succeeded in buying tombstones. The majority of us are those who do not own anything. We are poor. We don't even have the means to support our families. We are suffering. Because there is no site, no place, in which we can develop ourselves.

But if we realise where our ancestors were living, that is the place where we could accumulate wealth and have land and fields to farm. Now we are just squeezed in a small place and forced to live inside a bottle. If we start complaining to the government, demanding our land back, the government says, 'Where are your title deeds?' - which are in effect receipts. But we do not have those things. We have the graves of our grandfathers.<sup>20</sup>

The textual importance of the graves is read in counterpoint to the texts on paper of 'the whites'. 'There are [we have] no papers,' says Barnas Mashego - hence the necessity of pointing to the graves *as title deeds*, as proof that the land belonged to the Moletele. The Moletele had come to the Blyde River Canyon 'long ago' in the time of the great-grandfathers - a genealogical measurement of time that points to a people-oriented, oral narrative reading of history.<sup>21</sup> From a perspective within the worldview of the Moletele, the inability of the forefathers to write a title deed in the Western sense is not seen as being relevant for ancestral title, much less as nullifying or extinguishing it. Moreover, Elphas Thete asserts that the graves represent a title which is also recognised by whites, who 'know how important they are - like their papers.'

Indeed, the graves of the ancestors are for the Moletele the sign of a superior title, superior not only historically (the fathers of the Moletele were on the land *before* the whites arrived) but also morally. The texts on paper, says Makhubedu, are *receipts* which the whites, having seized, surveyed and sold the land amongst themselves, 'wrote to each other'. As such their title deeds witness to an alien and alienating conceptualisation and spirituality of land, involving its commodification and private ownership. The paper receipts/deeds witness to a history, concisely and powerfully stated by Makhubedu, of dispossession, displacement, demarcation and sale. Petrus Makhubedu's identification of white title deeds with receipts is central to his critique of the white dispossession of his people from the land of their foreparents and their subsequent and enduring impoverishment at the hands of their dispossessors.

Makhubedu's analysis exposes in a few short words a white market in land founded upon the dispossession of his ancestors and enforced through the possession and registry of receipts-as-title-deeds - experienced as a comprehensive (conceptual and physical) violence. When the Moletele demand that they be allowed to go back to their land the response of the white government, 'Where are your title deeds?' is read by Makhubedu as asking in effect,

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Isabel Hofmeyr, *We Spend Our Lives as a Tale that is Told: Oral Historical Narrative in a South African Chieftdom*, Social History of Africa Series, Johannesburg, 1993.



'Where are your receipts?' Of necessity, Makhubedu is employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, refusing conceptually to buy into the white market in land. 'We do not have those things,' he says - a statement of both fact and tradition, as is evident in the sentence which follows: 'We have the graves of our fathers.' The Moletele do not have title deeds in the form of receipts; those things, in contrast to the older communal tradition of the Moletele, 'came in with the whites.' Thus when Makhubedu says, 'We have the graves of our grandfathers,' he is not only answering the question of title deeds as posed from a Western point of view, he is also asserting his own tradition, contesting the paper deeds of the whites in his own conceptual arena. In the words of one of his colleagues in the Greenvalley Farmers Union:

It is true that our forefathers just occupied the land. They lived there and occupied it. They did not buy it to own it - that was not their way. This thing came in with the whites. That is why they say that the graves of our forefathers prove that they lived on that land. That they have a long history there. After the Land Act black people could not buy farms. Blacks had the ability to buy land, but were not allowed by law! <sup>22</sup>

The graves are thus seen as having a significance which answers more than the white question asks. When the question 'Where are your title deeds?' is interpreted as 'Where are your receipts?' it becomes an indictment of those who are asking the question - for the deeds-as-receipts point back to the origins (violent, 'clever', and self-interested) of the white market in land in South Africa. The incisiveness Makhubedu's analysis cuts through the self-referential and self-justifying *Weltanschauung* which the whites brought with them to South Africa, exposing its inherent and systemic injustice, and its attendant impoverishing legacy among his people. The economic effects of dispossession are referred to both in the specific sense that few of the Moletele families could afford to buy a tombstone with a written text for their graves, and in the general sense that the majority of the Moletele 'are those who do not own anything ... are poor ... (who) don't even have means to support (their) families ... are suffering, because there is no site, no place in which we can develop ourselves.' At present they are 'squeezed in a small place and forced to live inside a bottle.'

The 'squeeze' has been enforced both legally, in accordance with land laws passed in the South African Parliament since 1910, and illegally - and violently in either case. Beginning with the Land Act of 1913, which set a legislative seal on what was by then two and a half centuries of dispossession, and continuing through to the early 1990s, successive white

<sup>22</sup> Group Interview with Setlhare and Moletele Members of the Greenvalley Farmers Union, Acornhoek District, Eastern Transvaal, Central Lowveld, 5 April, 1994, p.3. With respect to the question of exercising an option, before 1913, to buy land and thus to enter into the land market, see the discussion below concerning the case of Mogopa.



governments enacted a litany of legislation designed to alienate Black South Africans from the land, save for designated rural 'reserves', later partially consolidated into ten 'homelands', and urban demarcations ('locations' and 'townships'). Moreover, those communities which succeeded, before 1913, in purchasing title deeds to their ancestral land, for example the Bakwena ba Mogopa and the Bakubung ba Ratheo, found that even these title deeds were not respected under apartheid, which swept aside their land rights both ancestral and purchase-deeded, and forcibly removed their communities from their land. Thus the question, 'Where are your title deeds?' is not only triumphalistically exclusionary, it is also disingenuous: the possession of the kind of title deed the question is looking for would in no way have guaranteed the Moletele security of tenure on their ancestral land under apartheid. As Aninka Claassens notes trenchantly, 'The law has not been used only to deny blacks access to private ownership of land, it has gone much further than that. It has been used to destroy the property rights of those blacks who managed to acquire title deeds before the 1913 Land Act closed the land market.'<sup>23</sup>

The graves of the ancestors, on the other hand, are seen by Makhubedu as marking the place where the Moletele could begin to turn their lives around, and return from poverty to prosperity. 'Where the ancestors were living' is the place where 'we could accumulate wealth and have land and fields to farm.' Restoring the land and its ancestral community to each other would restore the potentiality of the community to live prosperous lives again, reversing the downward spiral of dispossession and impoverishment set in motion by the arrival of the whites. It is a utopian vision which looks backwards and forwards at the same time, maintaining its sense of community with the ancestors, current and future generations. At the same time it is important to note that Makhubedu's vision is that of a farmer who wants his farm back, so to farm it again, and not that of a man merely nostalgic for the way it was. There is a prophetic pragmatism which characterises local struggles for land restoration which, while uncompromising with respect to the basic question of the need for and right to land restitution, is strategically flexible.<sup>24</sup> While post-election (April, 1994) expectations continue to be high they are not unrealistic. A hard line like 'no land, no vote' was itself both an assertion of principle and a strategic ploy, meant to catalyse the restitution process in the legal and political

<sup>23</sup> Aninka Claassens, 'For whites only - land ownership in South Africa,' in Michael de Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, IDASA, Cape Town, 1991, pp.51-52.

<sup>24</sup> The term 'prophetic pragmatism' forms the title of the final chapter of Cornel West's *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, 1989) and is an aptly reflexive description of the strategic employment of traditional customs like cleaning the graves of the ancestors as a means of getting a 'foot hold' back on the land. Such strategies are not all ploy, however, beyond their instrumentality lie ancestral traditions still very much alive in the communities, as will be seen in detail in chapter three.

arenas, and to retain the initiative and ownership of rural land struggles in the hands of the communities themselves. What was (and still is) expected is not an impracticable *restitutio in integrum* but a return of land and people to each other so to enable the re-establishment of the multivalent linkages necessary for the success of the resumption of life on the land, towards a healthy and prosperous life in full community.

The textuality of the graves of the ancestors is both explicit and implicit. With respect to the former, names, dates, commemorative inscriptions and blessings are recorded on the stones which have written texts, and families and in some cases clans may be identified in the graveyards. This explicit textuality has, in a Western sense, a direct historical and legal significance for ancestral claims. Questions of language and context in the broader sense also arise: in what language(s) are the stones written? What does this say concerning the state of play with respect to in(ter)culturation?<sup>25</sup> With respect to an implicit sense of text, the very existence of the graves in the landscape, whether they bear a written text or not, is textual. The existence of a graveyard, its being, testifies to the presence of people on the land, and an ancestral hermeneutic will look for what is written just below the surface of the land, for the subjacent text, for what the land as humanly landscaped may be said to remember in its formations. It will listen, as it were, for what the stones say.<sup>26</sup> This subjacent reading is

<sup>25</sup> The following inscription, for example, is taken from the graveyard of the Bakubung ba Ratheo at Molotestad. The text, written in both English and Setswana, is inscribed on a home-made stone, framed by a ring of sea shells embedded in the concrete:

In Remembrance of My Loving Husband  
Richard Monnakgotla  
who died on 21.7.1940  
Rest in Peace my Husband  
Until we Meet Again with the Love of God

In Setswana there is the addition of the word '*Morena*', Chief, in front of Richard Monnakgotla's name:

Kgopotso ea Monna oa Ka  
Morena Richard Monnakgotla  
[o shwele ka 21.7.1940  
Robala Kagisong Monna oa Ka  
Ho Fihlela Re Kopana Hape le Lerato la Modimo]

[There is no date of birth.]

<sup>26</sup> Simon Schama, in his magisterial *Landscape and Memory* (London, 1995), describes his pilgrimage to find the graves of members of his Jewish family buried in Punske, a small village in the north-eastern region of Poland/Lithuania. He discovers an out-of-the-way Jewish cemetery thickly overgrown with grass and flowers, and initially despairs of finding inscribed headstones, thinking that the Nazis or the Lithuanians themselves may have removed them. He then begins to feel the stones beneath his feet and has to work hard to uncover them, seeking to read their fading inscriptions. With reference to both their explicit and implicit textuality he writes: 'It was only by crushing the dandelions underfoot that I could feel something other than soft-packed dirt. I knelt down and parted the stalks and leaves, brushed away the fuzz of their seedballs. Two inches of grizzled stone appeared, the Hebrew lettering virtually obliterated by heavy growths of tawny and mustard-coloured lichen. I could just make out a name, Tet, Bet Yud, Hay, Tevye, Tovyeh? I sat and swept my arms about ... Another stone

necessary in an ancestral hermeneutics in order to avoid the erroneous assumption that inscribed tombstones have always been a normative part of the burial traditions of black South African communities, or that they are so now in all cases. It also recognises that most families could not afford to pay for inscribed headstones - a point made in several of the communities.

What, for example, may be read from a pile of stones in the landscape - from several such piles of stones together, overgrown with grass and bush, particularly if we are looking for a subjacent text from within a communal struggle for ancestral land? Are they graves? Are they the ruins of homes, schools, shops, churches? A text emerges at once historical, legal, familial-social, religio-cultural. Further, stories are told about these stones, stories which are about people: grandmothers and grandfathers, brothers and sisters, children who passed away in infancy and children who grew up and (were) relocated. They are told to children who do not know who lived in the houses, learned in the schools, worked in the shops, worshipped in the churches, and now rest in the graves. Introductions are made. Stories about the family and the community are told. A narrative history is related, a community memory is shared. The stories are told at graveside, in homes, community meetings, churches, courts, conferences, rallies, and deliberations *in camera* and before the cameras as part of the struggle for land restitution. The *Memorandum* of 25 June 1993 is itself but a summary of this analysis and articulation. And this is before we check to see if some of the piles of stones in the landscape include a tombstone at their head, upon which we may find a written text. Such a text will of course be more specifically articulate; in its names, dates and blessings it will offer in a more defined voice a historical, legal, social and religio-cultural witness to the reader engaged in such lithography.

History as *memoria passionis*, as oral narrative of communal suffering, plays a key role in such ancestral readings, as does the associated sense of anamnestic solidarity with the ancestors. Petrus Makhubedu, for example, says his father showed him the graves of his grandfather and grandmother, and that he is now charged with the responsibility of showing the graves to his own children and telling them of their foreparents. The familial narration is obstructed, however, for 'the whites' block his access to his family's graves, denying him permission to visit. The effort to erase family and community memory is part of the dispossession; in such a scenario the *memoria passionis* is extinguished and anamnestic

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appeared and another. Digging down a few inches brought another up from the netherworld - I could have spent a day with a shovel and shears and exposed an entire world, the subterranean world of the Jews of Punske ... The tombs themselves were being buried, sliding gently and irrevocably into their companionable mound as verdant Lithuania rose to reclaim them. The headstones that had been lovingly cut and carved were losing any sign that human hands had wrought them. *They were becoming a geological layer*' (1995: 36, italics mine).

solidarity between present and past generations is thus pre-empted.<sup>27</sup> The oral narrative traditions which attend the reading of the graves as text are thus an essential part of their significance in local struggles for land restitution. This is evidenced in Makhubedu's memory, 'When we visited the graves our father would tell us...'; and again in Rev Pasha's statement, 'Parents show their children and their children's children the graves and tell the story. That is why the fight for the land will never end.'<sup>28</sup>

The implicit textuality of the graves of the ancestors points beyond the graves to the land itself as text, as a discourse of images. What may be read from the land itself - from the verdant green of white-occupied land to the red dust and *dongas* (ravines) of the 'homelands'; from the homesteads of Ventersdorp and Boons to the bulldozed ruins of Mogopa and Molotstad - constitutes an essential text in a grounded hermeneutics of land restitution. Further, a grounded hermeneutics of the land as text is related to the orality and narrativity of the communities that call that land home. It is shaped by their narratives, which are a reading of that text. The narratives may be local (micro-narratives), regional and/or national, and may participate to a lesser or a greater extent in a meta-narrative, of identity for example, or of emancipation and return. Moreover, a reading is not a one-off act, it is dynamic; there are readings and re-readings. And the text itself, the land, is also changing over time. There is thus a making and re-making of sense, from orality to textuality and back again, with respect to the life of the community on and away from the land, and back again.

These readings and re-readings are not haphazard, however; they are formed by a historical consciousness which, like any human experience, shapes the modes of rationality through which sense is made of reality. Thus the question: which rationality, and whose, is relevant for local land struggles.<sup>29</sup> In particular, when the historical consciousness in question

<sup>27</sup> Concerning the manipulation and/or erasure of memory as part of dispossession, the following observation of Franz Fanon is apposite: 'Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it' (*The Wretched of the Earth*, N.Y., 1963, p.210).

<sup>28</sup> The inter-relation of oral narrativity and texts in stone (written and unwritten) in a community's *memoria passionis* is evoked powerfully in the following lines from the song 'Nicaragua' by singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn:

'For every scar on a wall,  
There's a hole in someone's heart,  
Where a loved one's memory lives' (from the album *Stealing Fire*, 1983).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. MacIntyre, J. *Whose Justice, Which Rationality?*, London, 1988. The recognition that we are living in a world of contested rationalities has, perhaps, been taken a step further during the transition period in South Africa, where contested rationalities, and contested traditions of rationality, have been part of the negotiation process, resulting to some extent in what we might call rationalities-in-dialogue, or even negotiated rationalities. On the one hand, this development is to be welcomed as necessary and constructive, particularly in its dialogical aspects and in the legal and legislative implications of such dialogue, for example with respect to recognition of communal forms of land tenure. On the other, it runs the risk of becoming an instrumental rationality shared only by a political and legal elite, and thus one which may seem to those at the local level to



is formed in a communal struggle for ancestral land against the forces of dispossession and impoverishment it may be expected that the hermeneutic will reflect that communal struggle. The liberative aspects of African tradition concerning land, people, the ancestors and God are thus foregrounded in ancestral readings of the land and graves as text. Within a communal struggle for ancestral land the graves signal a *relational rationality*. That there are also repressive aspects of African tradition concerning the land, especially with respect to the rights of women, must also be remembered - the critique of which by rural women calls for the relational rationality of ancestral hermeneutics to be fully inclusive. The graves, it is noted, witness to the presence of the foremothers as well as and together with that of the forefathers.

The question of rationality is itself a site of struggle. Josiah Young, for example, in a critique of Imanuel Geiss' *The Pan-African Movement*, decries his 'Eurocentric hermeneutics that would deny blacks the struggle for self-definition.' Rejecting Geiss' label of 'irrational' for the efforts of Pan-Africanists to explain the ongoing significance of African heritage, Young asserts that it is Geiss' Eurocentrism, and not the African heritage itself, that causes him to argue that the African heritage should be abandoned. The question of whether preoccupations with African heritage are in any way irrational is thus 'not essentially related to Geiss' position.' 'Adjudication of rationality is often but the projection of one "grammar" of existence upon another "grammar,"' argues Young. 'The grammars have no necessary metaphysical connection: Geiss' view of the African heritage and African heritage itself are not necessarily related.'<sup>30</sup> Young is thus free to observe, with no little relevance for rural land-less communities, that, far from African heritage having been 'dissolved' (Geiss) by modernity and the technological mores intrinsic to it, 'the popular masses, in their own self-sufficiency of insight, do not forsake ancestral legacies as they resist the dehumanising crisis of postmodernity.'<sup>31</sup> Indeed, given the fluidity of contemporary debate in Western discourse, modern and postmodern, concerning rationality, in general and with particular reference to moral responsibility,<sup>32</sup> there may finally be an audience in the West for African modes of

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be a new homologising rationality, in contrast to expectations of a facilitative process of local encounter and dialogue between and among contested traditions of rationality in South Africa. In short, a process of rationalities-in-dialogue, when under the pressure of political timelines imposed from above, runs the risk of being subsumed under an instrumental process of rationality-by-negotiation. For contested rationalities to become rationalities-in-dialogue is an ambitious goal, and will require a process that has time to breathe.

<sup>30</sup> Josiah Young, *A Pan-African Theology: Providence and the Legacies of the Ancestors*, Trenton, N.J. 1992, pp.196, 198-99. For Geiss, see *The Pan-African Movement*, New York, 1974.

<sup>31</sup> Young, *ibid.*, p.197.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Zygmunt Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford, 1993; David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity, An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford, 1989; Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern*, London, 1995. Bauman argues that moral phenomenon are inherently non-rational in that they are moral only if they precede the calculations of purpose, gains and losses of instrumental reason. He asserts that 'from the perspective of the "rational order", morality is and is bound to remain *irrational*' (italics his). The 'irrational' is



making sense. However that might be, openness to traditional African modes of making sense will be indispensable to the legitimacy of the proceedings of the Land Commission and Land Claims Court of the new South Africa. In this connection, a more open approach to the question of the admissibility of evidence in the Land Court has already been adopted in the Restitution of Land Rights Act as follows:

30. (1) The (Land Claims) Court may admit any evidence, including oral evidence, which it considers relevant and cogent to the matter being heard by it, whether or not such evidence would be admissible in any other court of law.
- (2) Without derogating from the generality of the foregoing subsection, it shall be competent for any party before the Court to adduce -
- (a) hearsay evidence regarding the circumstances surrounding the dispossession of the land right or rights in question and the rules governing the allocation and occupation of land within the claimant community concerned at the time of such dispossession; and
  - (b) expert evidence regarding the historical and anthropological facts relevant to any particular claim.
- (3) The Court shall give such weight to any evidence adduced in terms of subsections (1) and (2) as it deems appropriate.<sup>33</sup>

There is thus an intercultural and intertextual dynamic involved as part of the hermeneutical terrain of struggle which one enters as one 'reads' the graves and the gravestones of the ancestors. In apposition (and in most restitution cases opposition) to registered rights recorded on paper, the texts in stone witness to the presence and residency of a community on the land, remembering and testifying to their lives by name, and placing those lives in familial and historical context by recording dates of birth and 'death'<sup>34</sup> of family members, and by the associative arrangement of the graves at the grave site. This intercultural and intertextual dynamic remembers on the one hand the underlying conflict of conceptualisations and spiritualities of land and land rights, and on the other signals a way forward, beyond the conflict of interpretations to an approach to otherness and difference that is not necessarily oppositional. Even so, the caution of Kritzinger, noted above, will continue to hold until the land needs and rights of land-less communities and families have been addressed in reality (*ka sebele*), 'We will not find common ground until everybody has some

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in this context associated with a nonconformity that resists official efforts to homologise thinking about morals. Bauman asserts that for a dominant and domineering moral rationality, 'the stubborn and resilient autonomy of the moral self is a scandal.' The moral responsibility of the moral self is, for Bauman, a 'being-for the Other,' an approach which offers enabling possibilities in a pluralistic context.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted from the Restitution of Land Rights Act (22, 1994), Section 30.

<sup>34</sup> The word 'death' in English is problematic with respect to the translation of the way in which 'death' is spoken of in Sotho, Pedi, Tswana, Pulana, etc. As will be discussed below, people are not said to have died as such, but to have become late. There are different words used for the 'death' of people ('*ho hlokahala*' in SeSotho) and the death of other forms of life ('*ho shoa*' in SeSotho). '*Ho hlokahala*' is not 'to die' but to become late, to pass into the realm of the ancestors.

ground' (1991). An ancestral reading of textuality and title requires, by definition, that the reading be located at the graves of the ancestors, and that this location be more than symbolic.

### 2.3.1.2 Chief Leputsoe Mogane, Dientjies: Performative Memory and Chiefly Discourse

Dientjies is a resettlement community 35 kilometres north of Graskop in the Mpumalanga Highveld. Its people, like those in Leroro 10 kilometres north-west along route 532, are Mapulana who were removed in the 1950s and 1960s from Frankfort, Hermansburg, Rotunda Creek, Black Hill, Vaalhoek, Buffelsfontein and other farms in the Pilgrim's Rest area. Dientjies, it may be understated, has been through difficult times. For example, a hospital built for the community in the 1950s was commandeered by the army before it could be opened, and was subsequently used as a place of training and treating dogs in military service. As Chief Mogane puts it, 'Here people are still suffering. They should have a hospital to help them. We think the soldiers should just forget about it. Health people, doctors and nurses should come and live there and treat people and not dogs ... so that the people will live.'<sup>35</sup>

The discursive style of Chief Leputsoe of the Mogane Mapulana is dramatic, inviting his hearers to be participants in his speech event, to be carried away with him to the place of which he speaks, and to be able to see what he sees in that place. The interview, in his home in Dientjies, was thus transported to the graves of the chiefly ancestors of the Mogane Mapulana. It was a performative discourse which took us miles and years away from where we sat - an *anamnestic event* characterised by what Cornel West has called kinetic orality.<sup>36</sup> At the same time Chief Mogane's speeches are proleptic, anticipating the return of his people to their ancestral lands. We join him at the beginning of this journey, a chiefly genealogy, and then follow him at selected points on his way.

Ah-gheec! Attention! Yes, I am Mogane. Chief Mogane of Tlhabekisa, also called Dientjies. I am the son of Pitase Mogane. Pitase was the son of Chaana Mogane, Chaana was the son of Kobeng. Kobeng was the son of Morongwe, Morongwe was the son of Robela, Robela was the son of Kgarudi, and Kgarudi was the son of Kwale... We are the first Pulanas who climbed over the mountains of Kobeng... After Kobeng died in 1915 at Hermansburg. After he died we were chased by the Boers...

Today we are just resettled here in a small desert [Dientjies]...

We are still fighting for our land, the land of the Mapulaneng, where we have lost

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Chief Leputsoe Mogane and Mrs Rebotile Marule Mogane, Dientjies, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, 18 May, 1994, p.6.

<sup>36</sup> See Cornel West, 'Black Culture and Postmodernism,' in B. Kruger and P. Mariani, eds., *Remaking History*, Dia Art Foundation, Discussions in Contemporary Culture Number 4, Seattle, 1989, pp 87-96. West describes 'kinetic orality' as follows: 'By kinetic orality I mean dynamic, repetitive, energetic rhetorical styles that form communities, e.g. antiphonal styles and linguistic innovations that accent fluid, improvisational identities and that promote survival at almost any cost' (:93).

our land, our residential land. To certify that this is our land we have to identify our forefathers' graves. To start with Hermansburg, we have the graves of Kwale, Kgarudi, Robela and Kobeng. Also the graves of Kgabishe. Also the graves of the Marule family are in Frankfort and Rotunda Creek. Those are the lands of the Mapulana, where the Pulas were living: the Mashegos, the Mashiles, the Chiloanes, the Maleles and so on. That is how we can identify our people, the way we have settled. This in turn helps us to identify where our land is. Where we have lived before. We go back to Pilgrim's Rest, to Mosetlane, to Black Hill, going down along the mountains to Mazane, to London, over to Vaalhoek, to Morolaneng ... over the mountains to Frankfort ... There are graves over the rivers; that is where the land of the Mapulana people is... These graves are going to prove the land of the Pulas, the way it is. There is no other proof that the old Pulas wrote down as a witness. All of us *batau* [lions/elders], let us go and secure our graves so that these graves will remain as our proof that this is our land.

We want the land of the Pulas back! We are going back to repossess our land. If there are no graves you cannot prove that this is your ancestral land. We have to indicate by these graves and also by the cattle kraals which are built of rocks in the old style, and by the ruins. Also, we can prove it by the *matambos* [flowers, the roots of which were used for food] and the *mosehla* [a root used for food] ...

We are still concentrating on Kgethuwe Enthabeni [where Kobeng is buried]. At Hermansburg. Here we see many of the graves of our ancestors. We are going to see more graves... The old grandmothers and grandfathers are here... we see the very beautiful grave of Chief Pitase Mogane. It was rebuilt and restored...

Also, we have visited today on the 18th [the day of the interview] the tombstone of Chief Kobeng. People want to see his tombstone. To see why Chief Kobeng's tombstone is so small, not clearly visible ... As people are walking around they see the tombstones of Pretty, Joy and all the other tombstones of the families of Chief Pitase. Today we want to clean the graves, the tombstones, and fence the graves ...

See also what these people, the Boers, have done on the land we are standing over. Today, on the 18th, we are having guests from overseas who have come to witness events of this kind. We are talking about this right here at Enthabeni Kgethuwe.<sup>37</sup>

In Chief Mogane's speech the connections between textuality, oral narrativity and anamnestic solidarity in ancestral hermeneutics are present in compelling detail. He takes us to his roots, literally with respect to the *matambos* and *mosehla* to be found near the graves and kraals of his ancestors. The graves and ruins are evidence that his people belong to the land they claim, and that that land belongs to his people. Indeed, the graves and ruins are said to be the only evidence, 'There is no other evidence that the old Pulas wrote down.' Yet the *matambos* and *mosehla* are still there also, and, coupled with his oral witness, may themselves be seen in an evidentiary way. Knowledge of flora, and in particular of herbs and medicines, signals an intimacy with place and features often in the oral testimony of many of those claiming land restitution.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Chief Mogane, *ibid.*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>38</sup> The oral testimony given to the CRLR in July 1996 by Mapulana evicted from the farms Vaalhoek, Buffelsfontein, Clermont, Bohlabepeba and Rietvley, for example, included numerous references to various herbs and types of trees. The *in loco* inspections of graves and ruins on the farms proved to be a time of rejoicing not only in the opportunity to visit the ancestors buried in the graves but also in the opportunity to collect various

At the same time, it is important to recognise that Mogane's speech is a chiefly discourse, displaying among other things the self-interest of a chief. Elsewhere in the interview Chief Mogane sought to make a case for the ongoing validity, even necessity, of the chieftaincy in the face of the popular critique of chieftaincy and the groundswell of support for the establishment of democratic local structures characterised by mutual accountability and the participation of all community members on an equal basis: chiefs and commoners, male and female. The Mapulana Chieftaincy is a complex of family lineages and dominant personalities, and bears the scars, as do most throughout the country, of the divisive, corruptive, and co-optive forces of apartheid. From the point of view of the 'commoners' the move to local democratic structures is long overdue, as evidenced in the proceedings of the Community Land Conference and in chapter eight of the *Land Charter*.<sup>39</sup> The point was also clearly articulated in the course of the group interview with the Mashilane Land Committee, where it arose in connection with the graves of the ancestors themselves:

Third Speaker: It is not only because of our *makgoshi* (chiefs), the graveyards of the *makgoshi* - also our ancestors, besides those *makgoshi* graves, are there in those graveyards. They also are pointing to the land as being ours.<sup>40</sup>

The graves of the ancestors, inclusive of the families of both the chiefs and commoners, are seen as title deeds in a sense which, while communal, is so in a way which also values the individual rights of each member of the community. A critical ancestral reading of textuality and title is thus one that is both in continuity with the communal traditions of the ancestors and in discontinuity with the compromised tradition of chiefly prerogative with respect to the allocation of land. Further, it is one that challenges the patriarchy of ancestral traditions concerning land allocation.

### 2.3.1.3 *Bakwena ba Mogopa: Intertextuality and Interculturation*<sup>41</sup>

The first group interview with members of the Bakwena ba Mogopa in June 1994, provided an intimate illustration of the relation between textuality and oral narrativity with respect to the graves of the ancestors. The Mogopa community, unlike the Moletete and at

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herbs and roots. Some claimants looked like they were preparing for Palm Sunday, they collected so many herbs during the inspections.

<sup>39</sup> See the *Land Charter*, section 8.5.

<sup>40</sup> Group Interview with Members of the Mashilane Land Committee, Elandsfontein, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, 2 February, 1994, p.6.

<sup>41</sup> The discourse and praxis of the Bakwena ba Mogopa has been well documented, though a gap has existed in the documentation with respect to their theological discourse. In what follows in this and succeeding chapters, I draw on group and individual interviews with members of the community (June-August 1994) and participant



great expense to its members, had purchased what were already its ancestral lands early in the century, only to see both its ancestral claim and legal (registered) title deed swept aside at the time of its forced removal in February 1984.<sup>42</sup> As such, the texts in question are written both on tombstones in the Mogopa graveyard and on the pages of their title deed. An intertextual reading in this case is thus an exercise in verification and corroboration. In the June interview, Daniel Molefe, Caroline Tladinyane, Maria Mathope, David Kgatitsoe and others present read the texts with reference to the *memoria passionis* of the Bakwena ba Mogopa, their sense of inter-generational community and the spiritual relationships between and among *batho* (people), *badimo* (spirits of the ancestors) and *Modimo* (God):

**Daniel Molefe:** When we say our graves are our title deeds, we are saying that our ancestors bought the land. They bought the land for their children and their children's children. This was also written on the title deed. That is what we fought so hard for. On the title deed it is written that this land is purchased for ourselves and our children's children. For future generations at Mogopa.<sup>43</sup>

Molefe's answer is of importance in two ways. First, he links the question of the graves as title deeds with the purchase of Mogopa by the Bakwena, thereby witnessing to the double claim, African and Western, unregistered and registered, which the Bakwena have on Mogopa. Second, he makes this linkage with reference to future generations of Bakwena at Mogopa, stating that the reason they purchased what was already their ancestral land was for the sake of their children and their children's children. The two points taken together shed light on why the Bakwena chose to make the compromise inherent in entering into the land market and buying what they already regarded as theirs: the reason they 'fought so hard' was for their children. The compromise with white authorities who were dictating, through land legislation and local practise, that Africans had to pay to own their land,<sup>44</sup> and the sacrifice which this entailed as each family in the tribe contributed to the purchase price, is to be understood in terms of the commitment of the parents to their children, embodying the future of the Bakwena. That the interests of future generations is written into the title deed begins to humanise, through an intercultural dynamic, the deed-as-receipt process, witnessing to the inter-

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observation and interviews on the occasion of their *mokete* celebrating the return of their second farm, Hartebeeslaagte, on 8 October 1994.

<sup>42</sup> The first farm, Swartrand, was purchased in 1911. The farm was expropriated by the government following the forced removal, and it was not until June 18th, 1991, after sustained legal action in a series of cases, that the then Minister of Regional and Land Affairs announced the return of title of the farm Swartrand to the Bakwena ba Mogopa. The adjacent farm, Hartebeeslaagte, was purchased in the 1930s and used mainly for ploughing - Swartrand being used for grazing and residential purposes. Together the two farms provided the basis for a prosperous community of approximately 5000 people. The title for Hartebeeslaagte was not returned to the Bakwena until after the elections, by the new Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom.

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Molefe, Group Interview with Members of the Bakwena ba Mogopa, 30 June, 1994, p.1.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion in Aninka Claassens (1991a: 46ff.).



generational sense of community inherent in ancestral claims to land, wherein current generations look back in anamnestic solidarity with the ancestors and forward in proleptic solidarity with their children and children's children. Molefe's speech thus testifies to the human presence of both the past and the future in the land claims of the Bakwena.

Immediately following Daniel Molefe's speech, Caroline Tladinyane and Maria Mathopi shift the emphasis to the religio-cultural significance of the graves for ancestral claims, witnessing to the multivalent integrality of local ancestral hermeneutics:

**Caroline Tladinyane:** That is why we wanted so much to come back. According to our tradition, at the end of the year we make a ceremony to venerate our ancestors. So we told them, the white authorities, this is why it is very important for us to stay close to the ancestors. According to our tradition we are not to stay far away from our ancestors' graves.

**Maria Mathopi:** I want to say this much: we Tswana people are people who are always in touch with our ancestors. Sometimes it may happen that one member of a family becomes sick. That person is taken to the graves, to plead to the ancestors to help to heal that person. This is imperative, because the grandfather or grandmother of that person is there.<sup>45</sup>

While the texts on the gravestones and the title deed of the Bakwena are important for the historical-legal aspects of their ancestral claim, their importance is inextricably related to religio-cultural aspects of the life of the Bakwena on their land, requiring an ancestral hermeneutic which searches for the linkages between and among *batho* (people), *badimo* (ancestors), and *Modimo* (God). These intertextual and intercultural linkages will be pursued in more detail in the following chapter.

#### ***2.3.1.4 The Barolong ba Mathwang: Integrality and Inter-traditionality***<sup>46</sup>

The Barolong, who had occupied their ancestral land at Matlwang/Machaviestad in the Western Transvaal since the middle of the nineteenth century, were removed to Rooigrond in Bophuthatswana in 1974. Each family was offered the insulting sum of R18.50 in compensation for their homes, which were then demolished in the course of the removal.<sup>47</sup> The community was divided during the course of the removal, with some families going to Rooigrond and others staying behind in the Potchefstroom area, principally in Ikageng Township. The government then transferred ownership of the land to the Potchefstroom Town

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Tladinyane and Maria Mathope, op cit., pp.1-2.

<sup>46</sup> The presentation of the discourse of the Barolong at Ikageng, Potchefstroom, draws on meetings with office holders of the Barolong Action Committee, their delegates to the TLRC, participant observation in meetings with government officials of the Department of Regional and Land Affairs in 1993 and 1994, and the Theological Hearing on Land Restitution organised in consultation with the Barolong Action Committee and the Covenant Project of the SACC, in Ikageng on 13 March, 1994.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. TRAC, 'Return to the Land,' *Newsletter* No.19, November, 1991, p.2.

Council, dominated until November 1995 by the right-wing Conservative Party. In 1990 an attempted re-occupation of Matlwang, following a 'permitted' visit to clean the graves of the ancestors, landed members of the community in jail on the charge of trespass. The charges were eventually dropped in an out of court settlement which required the Barolong resident at Ikageng to undertake not to return to their land without official permission. On Good Friday, 1992, well into the transition process at the national level, members of the Barolong were again arrested on the charge of trespass; they had returned to Matlwang for their annual Easter weekend services.<sup>48</sup>

Twenty-two members of the Barolong Action Committee (BAC) participated in a theological hearing on land restitution in March 1994. The three excerpts below are representative of the speeches made concerning the graves of the ancestors as title deeds, witnessing to the integrality and inter-traditionality of local theologising concerning the graves and their significance for land struggles. In the first excerpt Mr Mokate begins with a theological interpretation of the 'graves as title deeds':

**D. Mokate:** Concerning the graves of our fathers: our relations with our fathers are the same as those of the children of Israel. We relate to them in the same fashion (*mokhoa*). Whenever we bury someone we make sure we place a stone at the head of the grave - where the head of the body is. This is whenever you bury someone - it can be your grandfather, your grandmother, your uncle, your aunt, or any other relative. By so doing it means that you are in covenant (*kgolagano*) with God (*Modimo*), the creator of that late person. This stone is a sign of the covenant with God, where I can get help. It is the stone of help (*lejo la thuso*). Also it shows that my grandfather, father or so on was laid to rest in this grave. Our family as a whole, uncles, aunts, children, are buried together. When I have troubles I go to their graves to pray to them for assistance. Amen.<sup>49</sup>

The inter-traditionality of Mr Mokate's theological discourse is evident throughout his speech. He draws a widely-observed parallel between the ancestral traditions of Israel and the African tradition of ongoing relations with the ancestors. The desire of Joseph, for example, that his bones be returned from Egypt to be buried in the land of his fathers, following the liberation and wilderness experience of the Israelites, is often cited.<sup>50</sup> Significantly for a grounded theology of land restitution, the locus of this linkage between biblical and African

<sup>48</sup> See discussion below under the heading, 'The Graves of the Ancestors as a Site of Struggle.'

<sup>49</sup> Lucas Kgatitsoe, translating the Barolong speeches, made several observations. Concerning the stone: 'It is not necessarily a tombstone, many could not afford one. The custom was more to place a stone larger than the others at the head of the grave.' Concerning 'extended families': 'The African sense of family contrasts with that of the white sense of family, where you have the father, mother and kids and it ends up there.' African family relationships comprise a much *wider embrace*: 'If there is anything of importance, members of the "extended" family must be consulted, and if it is a *mokete* all must be invited. And they are many in number.' Decrying the attenuated state of these traditions in the cities, Lucas continues, 'But now we are getting Anglicised. Old ways are not practised in the city now. Not so much. The ones born with my father, whom you would call my uncles and aunts, must know what is going on and contribute. But now they don't do it. They don't use it. They are Westernised to some extent' (translation Notes, Barolong Theological Hearing, p.1).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Genesis 47:29-31; and Joshua 24:32.

traditions is the grave site. In particular the stone at the head of the grave, not necessarily inscribed, is taken as the focus of the contact between the present generations of the Barolong, their ancestors and God (*Modimo*). Moreover, the Barolong are described by Mokate as being in a covenant relationship with *Modimo*. *Kgolagano* is the word employed to translate the Hebrew *b'rit* and the Greek *diatheke* in Tswana translations of the bible, and is also used in Tswana communion (*selallo*) liturgies. In Sotho the word is *selekane*: for example, 'the new covenant in Christ's blood' is rendered as *selekane se secha mading a Krete* in Sotho translations of the Gospels and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians.<sup>51</sup> That the primary referent of this language is biblical is clear not only in the reference to the children of Israel and their forefathers, but also later in the hearing when biblical traditions concerning land are discussed at length. The stone placed at the head of the grave marks the sign of the covenant between the people (*batho*) and God (*Modimo*), wherein God is identified as the Creator of the person whose grave it is, and the covenant relationship characterised as one of help for those who belong to it and participate in it. Indeed, the stone at the head of the grave is called 'the stone of help,' *lejoa la thuso*, by Mokate, who testifies to his faith in the God of the covenant, and also to his belief that his ancestors play a role in such help from the realm beyond the grave. The inter-traditional emphasis on the biblical God of the covenant and the ancestors is evident also in the relationship between the Barolong ba Matlwang and their German partners (in Lübeck) in the Covenant Programme of the SACC. The symbol of the Covenant Programme is a rainbow over a pair of joined hands, one black and one white. At a theological hearing in September 1996 concerning the Barolong's experience and understanding of covenant (*kgolagano*), the rainbow symbol was read in an inter-traditional way: the Genesis tradition of the covenant between Noah and God shared time, usually in each speech, with the Barolong tradition that a rainbow was 'motse oa badimo', the village of the ancestors. The covenant was seen to be between and among God (*Modimo/Jehova*), the ancestors, current generations of the Barolong, their children to come, and their partners in the Covenant Programme, and was experienced as a relationship that began with God and extended in a wide embrace to include all who belonged by faith to the covenant, to the mutual benefit of all.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> In Sotho, 1 Corinthians 11:25 is quoted during the blessing of the communion elements, as follows: '*Senoelo sena ke selekane se secha mading a ka; etsang hoo ka mehla eohle ha le e-noa, le tle le nkhopole ka hona.*' ('This wine is the new covenant in my blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.') The importance of the *anamnesis* of the Eucharistic liturgy (*eis tèn emèn anamnèsin, le tle le nkhopole ka hona*) for the sense of anamnestic solidarity inherent in ancestral hermeneutics is an area which requires further research. The presentation of Jesus as 'Proto-Ancestor' by Bujo (1992), for example, offers some useful possibilities.

<sup>52</sup> The Barolong returned to their land at Matlwang on 28 April, 1995 - during the Easter season. The Theological Hearing was held at Matlwang on 24 September 1996 in the new school (building still in progress). See the official transcription of the hearing, unpublished, available from the Covenant and Land Programme of

With respect both to the question of the identity of *Modimo* (African?, Biblical?, Afro-Biblical?) and the question of the source of the help referred to (Jehovah?, *Modimo*?, *badimo*?, all?), Mr Mokate's speech witnesses to a both/and inter-traditionality and not to an either/or oppositionality. This inter-traditionality is not systematically developed, however, and may be said at most to represent a re-patterning, or a *con*-patterning, of African and biblical traditions.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, that the traditions are related in the theological discourse of the TLRC communities does enable us to speak, however cautiously, of an *inter*-traditionality.

Further, we must note that the grave marks the place where the family member (wide embrace) is buried and *present*, not buried and absent. He or she is not said to have died but to have become late. The verb is *ho hlokahala*, meaning variously to be rare or scarce, to be no more, or to be late. The verb used with respect to other life forms is *ho shoa*, to die. Of people it is said *ba tsamaile*, they have gone on, or *ba hlokahetse*, they have become late, rare, or scarce. It is often said that, having passed into the spirit world, they have become invisible but are nonetheless still present, communicative and responsive (for good or ill depending on how they are treated).

Mr Mathibe then picks up the theme, moving from a theological interpretation to a historical-legal interpretation of the significance of the graves, while at the same time continuing the previous emphases on inter-generational community and oral narrativity:

**Mr J. Mathibe:** I also greet everyone and also our visitors. Briefly, I can say I am supporting what our father Mokate has said. Our graveyards are a witness and a proof of our origin. It is also a historical record of our people for our future generations. In time to come our children and our children's children may ask us where our fathers were buried. Maybe they will say, 'Grandfather Serame - we have heard of him and we want to know what happened to him and where he is buried.' Then we will be in a position to go to his grave and show where he lived and where he is sleeping now. Furthermore, it is a sign that we originated in this place - we are from here. So it is a historical proof that this place belongs to us. And this is the visible witness to our future generations.<sup>54</sup>

Mr Mathibe articulates well the human linkages between past, present and future in ancestral hermeneutics, uniting the themes of the graves as 'historical proof' on the one hand, and as familial witness for future generations on the other. The importance of telling the story of the family and of the community from generation to generation, and of the graves as the site

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the SACC; and my report to the Programme, dated 26 September 1996. The Barolong *Mokete* is planned for April 1997 - again, Easter time. On the significance of Easter in the struggle of the Barolong for Matlwang see below.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Schreier (1985) would likely see this inter-traditionality as part of a 'dual system' - but even this categorisation may be premature. Further research is required. The theme of inter-traditionality is returned to in the following chapter.

<sup>54</sup> Barolong Theological Hearing, op cit., p.2.



of such oral narrativity, is again foregrounded.<sup>55</sup> It is an identity discourse that locates the family at the graves of its ancestors, a location that in turn roots the family by name in the soil.

Mrs L Lekoma, in one of the most succinct conflations of the historical-legal and theological aspects of ancestral hermeneutics articulated in the course of the research, then offers a speech which is at once Black, African and Prophetic:

**Mrs L. Lekoma:** With respect to the graves of our ancestors being our title deeds - I'm going to add to what the others have said. We thank our parents, our ancestors, for having provided us with land where we can stay. Unfortunately, after they did the Boers came and fought with us, and they took our land. That's why we say this is the land of our ancestors - because they were the people who were born to those forefathers who came here long ago, and even bought the land long ago. Also, they are the people who are always helping us with everything that we need - our ancestors (*badimo*). And also our God (*Modimo*), we ask both our ancestors and God to help us with anything we ask for and are doing.

I am just saying briefly also that it is a reality that it is our ancestors who are the people who are our help, we the people of Matlwang. We also thank God for you people who are prepared to visit us time and again - and I pray that one of these times you visit us you find us packing our possessions to return to Matlwang, by the help of the ancestors and God. With these few words I thank you all.<sup>56</sup>

Mrs Lekoma's speech witnesses both to the multivalent integrality (religio-cultural and socio-economic and political) of ancestral hermeneutics and to the inter-traditionality (*badimo* and *Modimo*, where *Modimo* is an African name for the God with many names, biblical and extra-biblical) of local theological reflection within rural land-less communities. Further, her discourse reveals this inter-traditionality to be part of the inclusive relationality of her people, a point to which we will return in the next chapter. As such her speech may be said to encompass the breadth and depth of what a grounded theology of land restitution has to offer the dialogical ethico-political process which characterises the search for a way forward in the new South Africa. At the same time, her speech indicates clearly what a grounded theology of land restitution demands of the ethico-political process at the national level: that it include the voices of people who live on the land as an essential, formative part of that process.

### 2.3.1.5 Interim Summary

Thus far, in answer to our opening question, 'What is ancestral about ancestral land claims?' a grounded reading of textuality and title with respect to the graves of the ancestors

<sup>55</sup> Elaborating on the historical-legal aspects of Mr Mathibe's speech, Lucas Kgatitsoe asserts: 'The graves are an historical proof and witness for the future that the peoples' roots are in a specific place, and that place is theirs: that their fathers bought it or lived there for generations. Like in Mogopa - you saw the graveyard - the many different clans buried there: the Kgatitsoes, Mores and so on. There is no-one who can come and say, "Your people did not live here. This is our place, not yours!" Because the graves, especially the tombstones, are a historical record of our peoples' lives in Mogopa. That is where their roots are; not in some other place' (translation notes, Barolong Theological Hearing, *ibid.*, p.2).



has pointed us in the direction of intertextuality, intercultural and inter-traditionality. The significance of the graves of the ancestors for ancestral land claims is both religio-cultural and historical-legal; further, the two dimensions of their significance are reciprocally related within the multivalent integrality of the grounded hermeneutics of rural land-less communities. At the same time, the *inter* in intertextual, intercultural and inter-traditional signals a *critical* dynamic. With respect to the issues of traditional chiefly hegemony and the rights of women on the land, the graves of the ancestors are the focus of a *memoria passionis* that includes both chiefs and commoners, both fathers and mothers - an inclusivity that has a stated bias for democracy, equality and mutual accountability within the communities. Thus, the *inter* signals a dynamic that displays both continuities and discontinuities with ancestral traditions on the land. Beyond their significance for rural land-less communities, the graves of the ancestors are a focus of interest on the part of all players in the struggle for land in South Africa. We move now to a consideration of the graves as a site of struggle with respect to land restitution and land reform more broadly.

### **2.3.2 The Graves of the Ancestors as a Site of Struggle**

The restriction, and in many cases complete denial, of access to the grave sites of the ancestors following forced removal is a recurrent theme and a source of deep and ongoing grievance in the TLRC communities. The graves have become sites of struggle in themselves, with both dispossessor and dispossessed recognising their religio-cultural and strategic significance.<sup>57</sup> We will consider the cases of the Mapulana (Mashilane and Mogane) of the Mpumalanga Highveld and the Barolong of Matlwang in the North West as indicative of this struggle, noting, in continuity with the foregoing discussion, that reading the graves as a site of struggle foregrounds the multivalent integrality of their significance for land restitution struggles and identifies them as one of the primary generative sources of a grounded hermeneutics.

#### **2.3.2.1 The Mashilane and Mogane Mapulana, Mpumalanga Highveld**

In the interview with the Mashilane Land Committee it became clear that the obstacles placed in the way of visiting the graves of their ancestors were intertwined with the vexed

<sup>56</sup> Mrs L Lekoma, Barolong Theology Hearing, *ibid.*, pp.4-5.

<sup>57</sup> A case in point is reported by Zakes Nkosi, Director of the SACC's Land and Covenant Programme. In a meeting of the Land and Covenant Committee on 18 September 1996 at Khotso House, Nkosi recalled a removal from Meyerton in the Vaal Triangle, involving the community of Rev Gift Morane: 'Take your graves with you and get out!' the people had been told. 'Get off and take your bones with you!' Following expressions of shock around the table, Nkosi added, 'It was not like Joseph, a voluntary carrying out of his bones from Egypt to the

question of contending chieftaincies. The exploitation by the apartheid regime of rivalries between and among Pulana and Pedi chiefs led to the division of the farm Elandsfontein (part of the ancestral land of the Mashilane since the 1860s) into two sections: Elandsfontein 1 and Elandsfontein 2. The graves of the ancestors of the Mashilane community at Elandsfontein 1 now lie on the 'other side' of the boundary created by the apartheid regime:

We find it very difficult to go there to our graveyard. It is on the other side, beyond the boundary they made, where they put up the other, what is he? Because there is a long procedure that must be undertaken - writing letters *requesting* to go there. And the police get involved ...

The problem is that we are supposed to put some tombstones there. They are of importance. Then again, we, according to our custom, we used to get there, visiting all the time ... to venerate our ancestors. But now the thing is, when getting there we are not allowed in the first place. We must get a permission. But that is the thing that worries us a lot. That we must not be punished in that way of getting such permission through offices, structures and channels. It's a pity. We don't like it.<sup>58</sup>

In response to 'it's a pity,' someone noted, 'It's not a pity, it's a policy.' The matter of having to get permission to visit the graves arouses a sharp sense of humiliation and anger, and is experienced as a spiritual oppression. In the course of the interview with Chief Mogane, when the question of visiting the graves of the Mapulana chiefs was raised he produced a book, an honours thesis by Hester Kruger of the University of Potchefstroom in which he and his people had collaborated, which contained a facsimile of the permission slip which he had been given by an official of the Transvaal Gold Mining Estates Limited (TGME) to visit his ancestors' graves at Hermansburg:

Permission has been granted to Mr Mogane, with a party of six, to visit graves at Hermansburg, subject to the conditions below. On the 27th, of the 10th of 1987, during the hours 3pm to 5pm. Signed S. Lynaugh, Assistant General Manager. Date of Issue, October 27, 1987.

1. no open fires are to be made
2. all gates to be closed on entry and exit
3. no trees are to be damaged
4. no firewood to be collected
5. no litter to be left<sup>59</sup>

It is with some irony that one realises that the 'party of six' to which the permission refers includes Hester Kruger - the research having occasioned the permission, a point confirmed by Chief Mogane. Following his introduction of the permission slip into the

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land of his fathers. They were ordered! Forced to take their forefathers' bones away from their land. It was a very inhuman treatment of people.'

<sup>58</sup> Group Interview with the Mashilane Land Committee, Matibidi, Elandsfontein, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, 4 February, 1994, p.6.

<sup>59</sup> As recorded by Hester Kruger, based on the original which is in the possession of Chief Mogane.

discussion, the interview explored the gaps in consciousness and spirituality evident in the two approaches, that of Chief Mogane and that of the TGME, to the matter of visiting the graves:

**Q:** They say no fires are to be made - what are they worried about?

**Chief Mogane:** They say you must not make any fire. You must not burn the place.

**Q:** But were you going to burn the place?

**Chief Mogane:** They say you must not make any *braai* [barbeque] under the trees. You must not make any smoke while you are there.

**Q:** What about a *mokete*? Would you not slaughter a goat, for example, and then cook it? Is that what they mean?

**Chief Mogane:** You can't make any fire. You can't cook there.

**Q:** Can you pray there?

**Chief Mogane:** You can pray.

**Q:** With the *badimo*?

**Chief Mogane:** With *badimo*. But you must not dance there. You must not do anything there.

**Q:** No dancing?!

**Chief Mogane:** No dancing. Nothing. You must not make a noise there.

**Q:** So you must just stay still?

**Chief Mogane:** Stay still. Talk to your *badimo*. Pack and go!

**Q:** Oh, they do allow you to talk!

**Chief Mogane:** To talk, yes, because you don't sing.

**Q:** Talking but no singing?!

**Chief Mogane:** You just talk. After that you finish, you must go. Don't do anything like enjoying. Don't dance.

**Q:** They are against dancing?

**Chief Mogane:** They are against dancing.<sup>60</sup>

In response to the repressive negativity of the restrictions (experienced as: no cooking, no singing, no dancing, 'don't do anything like enjoying,' 'stay still, talk, pack and go') Chief Mogane launched into his final speech of the day, the opening notes of which sound a call to freedom and joy in the practice of traditional customs in the ancestral lands of the Mapulana:

We are going to start explaining about our original schools and traditional songs. And again to visit our graves and ancestral rites at Hermansburg and Mapalagele. Now, we are going to start with dancing and traditional songs. Women, children and men will dance. There must be no obstacle. There is no person who must restrict people from visiting Frankfort and Black Hill, or from visiting all our Mapualana lands. We must visit them. We must enjoy them. If you want to visit the graves these days, come to Chief Mogane and tell him...and invite him to the celebrations (*mekete*), where there will be delicious foods and braais. I will accompany you. Now is the time [*awa, jwale ke nako*: now is the *kairos*] that we should return to our land!

I refer you back to the Hermansburg mountains where I showed you [in a previous speech] that beautiful house, the hotel, which I pointed to with my finger, believing that it will be given to me and I will live there. As a chief I will regularly pay visits to that house. Now is the time that we will return to our land. *Thobela!* [Thank-you!]<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Chief Mogane, op cit., pp.7-8.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p.8.

While his call to make *mekete*, to dance, sing and *braai* without restriction at the graves of the ancestors is a powerful and attractive invitation, Chief Mogane's speech positions himself, with no little grandeur, at the centre of this call. His vision is very much that of a chief anticipating not only the return of his people to their ancestral lands, but that their return will occur under his leadership, at his invitation, and involve his own return to traditional patriarchal leadership in all of its fullness. His discourse displays little sign of the compromised and ambiguous position in which the chieftaincy stands as South Africa inventories the legacies of apartheid. His vision, wanting to be idyllic, is problematic in his seeming lack of awareness that the grandness with which he expresses his chiefly patriarchy is not shared, but viewed with suspicion, by 'commoners' engaged in the struggle to return to the ancestral lands of the Mapulana. Ancestral hermeneutics needs to be a critical hermeneutics if the liberative aspects of ancestral tradition are truly to empower all members of the communities. The danger is that those who formerly held discursive power in patriarchal ancestral tradition - chiefs, headmen, male heads of households - will seek it again, and in ways which again marginalise and exclude other members of the community. The graves of the ancestors are thus revealed in the discourse of Chief Mogane to be a site of struggle both within and without rural land-less communities.

### **2.3.2.2 *The Barolong ba Matlwang, North-Western Province***

Moving from the Mapulana of the Mpumalanga Highveld to the Batswana of the North West, the case of the Barolong of Matlwang is particularly grievous with respect to the graves as site of struggle. As noted above, the Barolong were arrested and charged with trespassing on their ancestral land during their Good Friday services in 1992. In the theological hearing on land restitution with the Barolong Action Committee, Mrs M Sephakwe provided a moving and important witness to the events of that day, and how they were interpreted in the community:

The father [Moruti Thabo] has come with a very painful subject when he comes with this topic of the graveyards and the ancestors. Those ancestors are powerful, and have the strength of helping us, even when they are late. The ancestors are stronger than people who are still alive. The graves of (our) people are in the graveyard at Matlwang, but when we go to visit those graves we are arrested! They say it is for 'trespassing'!<sup>62</sup> This is another hurtful experience that was taking place.

In 1992 we were arrested at Matlwang on Good Friday! During the Service! It was a very big day, the day of our Lord's crucifixion, when he spoke the seven words from

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<sup>62</sup> The Potchefstroom City Council, which held the rights to the land at Matlwang, was until November 1995 controlled by the Conservative Party. During the transition period the police in the Potchefstroom jurisdiction continued to hold to a hard line of enforcement of old and soon-to-be-superseded laws.



the cross. It was on that day we got arrested! Where Jesus said from the cross, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' And we also said, 'Father forgive the Boers because they do not know what they are doing to us.' They don't have power to judge us. We were just going to our foreparents' graves and it was not necessary for them to arrest us! We have the right to visit the graveyard of our ancestors any time that we feel like visiting them!

... The father, I say again, said something very difficult and important. While we were in jail I said to my brother's sons, 'Tomorrow I should have been inducted and robed as a member of the Mothers' Union in the Service. Tomorrow I should have been given my uniform. The painful thing is that when my name is called in that Service what will people say? People are going to say I am absent because I am in jail!'

But fortunately there were phones busy at that time calling Johannesburg - which resulted in our being released from jail on Saturday. When the people were called to be robed, I was present. [- then loudly, with excitement -] It was because of the powers of the ancestors that I also was robed that day! Because they saw the pain we were put through. I was even on that day provided with transport from the jail to the township for the Service. These people who arrested us - they used a thousand vans to arrest us who were so few in number, 75 people! God was with us; we did not even fight.

On the Thursday (before Good Friday) I asked my children to call the people, the mothers and fathers. When they came they wanted to know why I had called them. I explained that I had called them to make a prayer. 'Let us pray.' I said. After prayer, then we will ask the police what really they want from us. We asked the police why they were still there (Matlwang), because permission had been given for us to be there for the Services. As soon as the police came I started singing a hymn and thereafter I prayed. After my prayer Father Ntsimane also prayed. As soon as we said, 'Amen', one of the policemen present said to the others, 'Why are we here? Because these people are not committing any offence. They are not breaking any law. So better let us go.' After that the police vans left. Later we were fetched by our sons to go to the Service.

Therefore, I want to say that the ancestors are very powerful. That is the reason why we slaughter cattle and make efforts to give to our ancestors.

We never even heard those seven words in 1992 on Good Friday when we were arrested. We did not get that far when the police came. Some of our people they were getting killed on Jesus' day! 'Father forgive them.' Because Jesus Christ said that when he was on the cross. Then we also said God must forgive these Boers, 'Father forgive them because they do not know what they are doing when they arrest us for being on our own land!' Because the land belongs to us, not the Boers!

Now I thank the father for bringing this statement that those graves are our title deeds. Amen.<sup>63</sup>

Three aspects of Mrs Sephakwe's testimony concerning the Good Friday arrest of the Barolong at Matlwang are especially significant for a grounded theology of land restitution: its inter-traditionality; its presentation of the cross as nexus of both suffering and forgiveness; and the reference to Johannesburg as a source of practical solidarity. With respect to inter-traditionality, a sense of irony is instructive as we hear Mrs Sephakwe thank her ancestors for helping her become a member of the Mothers' Union of her church: 'It was because of the powers of the ancestors that I also was robed that day!' While some will view her speech as one marked by contradiction and perhaps confusion, it is more commensurate with the inter-traditionality of local theologising within land struggles to view her speech as one that witnesses to the process of interculturalisation in general and to a dialogue of spiritualities in



particular. *Modimo* is worshipped as the Creator God of the bible, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ and the Creator of us all, in a way which does not require that traditional communication with and veneration of the ancestors be eradicated. That such an uprooting occurred as part of the comprehensive violence of forced removal and relocation, and was indeed an interim goal of conversion-oriented Western evangelistic efforts, may not be denied; at the same time it is evident in the inter-traditionality of the discourse and praxis of rural communities that ancestral traditions have survived the eradictory processes of colonialism, apartheid and modernity. Communities like the Barolong ba Matlwang are engaged, in the course of their struggles to return to their ancestral land, in a process of re-radicalising themselves in the soil of Africa; their ancestral ties to Matlwang, in all their multivalency, while attenuated, have not been severed by forced removal. Further, it is clear that the Barolong are engaged in a process of self-theologising, practising ancestral and biblical hermeneutics with a relational rationality that makes connections between biblical and African contexts and struggles.<sup>64</sup>

Where a conservative rigidity would lead some to a categorical rejection of such inter-traditionality, and an uncritical liberalism would lead others to celebrate it without having first examined it, what is primarily at issue here is that for Mrs Sephakwe and the majority of the members of the TLRC communities, inter-traditionality is an enabling aspect of an empowering spirituality of land restitution, and as such plays a significant role in the struggles of local communities to return to their land and their lives on it. The outrage of 'Christian' policemen breaking up the Good Friday Service in 1992,<sup>65</sup> is addressed, in the testimony of Mrs Sephakwe, by both God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the ancestors, the fathers and mothers of the Barolong. Her testimony, moreover, was supported and corroborated by the other members of the Barolong Action Committee (BAC) who addressed the question. It is apposite to note that members of the BAC are also members in the local Methodist congregation, as were their ancestors going back several generations. The graves of the ancestors themselves testify to this inter-traditionality: graves with inscribed headstones bear biblical references and Christian symbols. The grave of the grandfather of Ishmael Servalo, Vice-President of the BAC, for example, is marked by a headstone in the form of a

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<sup>63</sup> Mrs M. Sephakwe, Barolong Theological Hearing, op cit., pp.3-4.

<sup>64</sup> See chapters five and six on biblical hermeneutics in local land struggles below. The term 'self-theologising' is taken from David Bosch, 'Toward a New Paradigm of Mission,' *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 14:4, 1990, p.150.

<sup>65</sup> This outrage is captured well by Mrs E. Mogotsi, who spoke shortly after Mrs Sephakwe. 'And it was amazing,' she exclaimed, 'that people who claim to be Christians can avail themselves to be used by the devil on

cross, with a circle of stone around the nexus of the cross. To visit his grave is to visit the grave of a Christian ancestor. To oppose the veneration (*not* worship<sup>66</sup>) of the ancestors and the worship of God is to misread the nature of the inter-traditionality involved, a misreading which displays a pre-emptive commitment to an alien hermeneutic, itself in the employ of an impulse to superiority characteristic of so much of Western Christianity in Africa. In the event, it was in spite of those bearing a Western Christian culture, the policemen, that Mrs Sephakwe was present when her name was called to receive her robe as a member of the Mothers' Union.

More striking still is Mrs Sephakwe's emphasis on Jesus' word from the cross, 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' She testifies that the Barolong felt themselves called to forgive the Boers, and also to call God to forgive them. In each case the relevance of forgiveness for the struggle for Matlwang is part of the testimony: the Boers, like those who crucified Jesus, did not know what they were doing. The land from which they were removing the Barolong was in fact their ancestral land; how, therefore, could they be 'trespassing' on their own land?! The call to forgive the Boers thus carries with it a clear-eyed condemnation of the sinfulness of their action (how could they 'avail themselves to be used by the devil') in arresting the Barolong for observing Good Friday services on their ancestral land. At the same time, the signal of willingness to forgive their oppressors, however painful their actions, is of key significance for the transition from the old to the new in South Africa. As deeply as the pain is felt, as evidenced in Mrs Sephakwe's repeated reference to the 'painful', 'hurtful' and 'difficult' nature of the subject, that pain has not eliminated from the Barolong a willingness to forgive their dispossessors and begin afresh. It is a prophetic, enabling spirituality, which draws great strength from its primary referent: the cross of Jesus Christ. That the cross, and indeed the crucifixion of Jesus upon it, has a central place in the narration of the Good Friday suffering of the Barolong is evident in the efforts of Mrs E Mogotsi to correlate the hour of Jesus' crucifixion with the hour of the arrest of the Barolong at Matlwang:

**Mrs E. Mogotsi:** I want to tell you that I am a lawyer. But I was put in jail for the people of South Africa ... I thank all the men and women who were on the way to climb the mountain of Matlwang for the Good Friday observance where they were arrested while praying. And we also were preparing ourselves to go to that Service, but we were warned by young men who came to warn us that people have already been arrested at that place. It was about three o'clock, the time when Jesus Christ was crucified! A very important time! And it was amazing that people who claim to be Christians can avail themselves to be used by the devil on such an important occasion: arresting people who were gathered together to remember Jesus' crucifixion. Because that was about the time of prayer. Of the cross.

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such an important occasion: arresting people who were gathered together to remember Jesus' crucifixion' (op cit., p.5). See her complete speech below.

<sup>66</sup> It was clarified repeatedly in interviews throughout the (former) Transvaal that veneration of the ancestors did not mean 'ancestor worship,' that the *badimo* were not in any way to be confused with *Madimo* - a point which will receive further attention in the following chapter.

Because before 12 o'clock people were put in jail. We, on our end, were anticipating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at 3 o'clock. Instead, at 3 o'clock we were praying for the people who were by now in jail! Because those people were arrested for nix! They did not break any law or commit any crime. They were not stealing. Claims were made that they were into politics!<sup>67</sup>

The presentation by Sephakwe and Mogotsi of the cross as nexus of both suffering and forgiveness is a powerful articulation of a redemptive theology, one with enabling power for both the Barolong and local white farmers in the process of reconciliation in a new South Africa. That is its 'politics'. Further, that the theological reflections of the Barolong on the cross of Christ arise out of an experience of being arrested on Good Friday for 'trespassing' on their ancestral land provides both an example of the spiritual suffering which the community has undergone in exile from their land and an internal interpretative clue concerning how the Barolong are making sense of that suffering in their present struggles. It is an inter-traditional reading, with one eye on the graves of the ancestors and one eye on the cross. At the same time it is not a cross-eyed reading: the two are not confused, nor are they opposed - they are seen as being distinct with respect to each other, yet related in the grounded hermeneutics of the Barolong. In the event the Barolong community, past and present, has remembered the suffering of Christ on the cross, and the Christ of the cross has known the suffering of the Barolong community. It is a remembering and knowing that is intimate and participatory. It is part of the *memoria passionis* of the community. The *botho* (relational humanity) of the Barolong is not denied; rather, it is embraced in this inter-traditionality, even as it may be said to be embraced by the Christ of the cross. That too is its 'politics' - subverting the divisive legacy of apartheid on the land in the consciousness of its people, and signalling a commitment to an inclusive relationality, the work of grace, for the present and future.

Moreover, the suffering of the Barolong on Good Friday 1992, and their relation of their suffering to the suffering of Christ on the cross, may be said to be not only part of the *memoria passionis* of the Barolong, but also part of the *memoria passionis* of God. The theological discourse of the Barolong concerning Good Friday 1992 reminds one strongly of Jürgen Moltmann's *The Crucified God*, wherein he argues that the cross of Christ is the foundation and criticism of all theology that purports to be Christian. 'The inner criterion of all theology,' asserts Moltmann, 'is the crucified Christ himself' (1974: 2). Further, he argues that it is the suffering of God that we see in the suffering of Christ on the cross and in the suffering of his followers throughout the generations and centuries. With relevance for both a grounded *theologia crucis* and for the praxis of the churches, Moltmann declares:

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<sup>67</sup> Barolong Theological Hearing, op cit., p.5.



Whether or not Christianity, in an alienated, divided and oppressive society, itself becomes alienated, divided and an accomplice of oppression, is ultimately decided only by whether the crucified Christ is a stranger to it or the Lord who determines the form of its existence (1974:3).

Moltmann considers the suffering of the victims of Auschwitz, and quotes with approval Elie Wiesel as saying (in *Night*, 1969) that it was God hanging on the gallows at Auschwitz (Moltmann 1974: 273-274); Mrs Sephakwe and Mrs Mogotsi consider the suffering of the Barolong as victims of forced removal and identify their ongoing suffering at the hands of the dregs of the apartheid regime with that of Christ on the cross. In all, we may declare, following Moltmann, that in the *memoria passionis* of the Barolong we may see the *memoria passionis* of God. 'It is necessary to remember the martyrs,' declares Moltmann, 'so as not to be become abstract' (1974: 278). In so saying he links anamnestic solidarity with the project of a *theologia crucis* grounded in the suffering and struggle of rural landless communities who participate intimately in the *passion* of Christ.

The third point in Mrs Sephakwe's speech that calls for attention is her reference to communicating with Johannesburg as a source of help - the city standing as a symbol of legal, financial, logistical and moral support. 'Fortunately there were phones busy at that time,' she says, 'calling Johannesburg - which resulted in our being released from jail on Saturday. When the people were called to be robed, I was present.' Yet even this help is seen through the lens of an ancestral hermeneutic, as if the ancestors had employed the lawyers as agents in their response. 'It was because of the powers of the ancestors that I also was robbed that day,' declares Mrs Sephakwe with strong emotion, 'because they saw the pain we were put through!' The pathway of pain, of *passion*, plays a crucial role in the relationality and hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. God and the ancestors are moved by *compassion*, and the agents they are seen to employ are similarly moved to be part of and to contribute to the life and liberation of the community. Throughout the resistance and restitution struggles of rural communities a network of lawyers, academics, political leaders, church leaders and field-workers, and, increasingly, the staff of development organisations both within and without South Africa have worked together in solidarity with the communities. It has been, for the most part, a critical and a self-critical solidarity, wherein friendships have been formed, assistance acknowledged with thanks, and criticism seen, though not always practised, as a two-way street.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Organisations like the Transvaal Rural Action Committee (TRAC), Surplus People Project (SPP), Association for Rural Advancement (AFRA) - and other affiliates of the National Land Committee (NLC), the Black Sash, the Legal Resource Centre, the Centre for Applied Legal Studies of the University of the Witwatersrand, various private lawyers and law firms (e.g. James Sutherland, retained by the Bakubung), the Kagiso Trust, the

## 2.4 Concluding Summary and Evaluation

Given the spiritual and strategic importance of the graves for land restitution it is no mystery that they have become a site of struggle. 'Returning to clean the graves of the ancestors,' always a sacred duty, became also a strategic ploy in the struggles of the communities - most famously, as will be seen below, in Mogopa. Grounding the strategy, however, and giving it an integral legitimacy beyond its instrumentality, are ancestral traditions which play an intimate role in the ongoing lives of the communities. The multivalent integrality of a grounded hermeneutics (rural, Black African and Prophetic), focusing on the graves of the ancestors as a *locus theologicus*, reading both surface and subjacent texts, requires of us a holistic hermeneutics awake to the linkages between the spirituality and praxis of restitution struggles. Such a hermeneutics of land restitution has the capacity to enable us to articulate a grounded theology of *Mayibuye iAfrika!*<sup>69</sup>

With respect to the inter-traditionality evident in ancestral hermeneutics, it must be reiterated that it is not systematic. There is a sense in which the respective interactive traditions are still searching for a vocabulary and grammar, a theological *lingua franca* to facilitate their dialogue, so to enable what would otherwise be a co-traditionality with an 'inarticulate speech of the heart' to become a more explicitly articulate inter-traditionality. 'In most cases,' observes Buti Tlhagali, 'the two traditions exist side by side. They do not speak to each other. They have not yet found a common language' (1994: 9). While the ancestral hermeneutics of

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Independent Development Trust, the Botshabelo Trust, the General Secretariat, Land and Covenant Programme and Regional Councils of the South African Council of Churches (SACC), the South African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), the Ecumenical Advice Bureau, the Institute for Contextual Theology, the African Spiritual Churches Association and the Council of African Independent Churches, have, among others, played crucial roles in support of the resistance and restitution struggles of rural land-less communities.

<sup>69</sup> The importance of the graves of the ancestors, both spiritually and strategically, is not only a rural matter, it has made the journey to the townships. Harry Makubire of Alexandra Township, from which 45,000 residents were forcibly removed to Soweto and Tembisa in the 1960s, tells the story of how, in the heat of the campaign for the reprieve of Alexandra Township in 1979, the graves of the ancestors came into play: 'About the graveyard. During all of our campaigning to get Alex back, when the people were told of our moves on their behalf, we said to the community, 'We dare not move from here because our grandfathers are here.' We said, 'Let us all go to the graveyard on a specific day and clean the graves.' Now, whether you had a relative in the graveyard or not - that was immaterial. This was an emotional issue! For an African, anything to do with the ancestors is a very emotional issue! Everyone went. Christians from all churches went! Clergy went! If you were a person you went! We were touching a nerve. There is great respect for the ancestors. Now, the people went very early and cleaned the graves. Then, spontaneously, having spoken with their ancestors, they went back to their homes and cleaned out their yards! The amount of rubbish pushed out of the yards into the streets embarrassed the West Rand Administration Board. Because they couldn't handle that much rubbish! So we said, 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness!' You could say that the environmental movement in Alex started in the graveyard! It came spontaneously, yet it also gave impetus to the political struggle ... The cleaning of the graves was a deep part of peoples' lives, and at the same time it was a shrewd political manoeuvre. It united the people. It brought them together, if ever they were apart, in the campaign for their land and their community' (Interview, 6 January 1994).



the TLRC communities may be seen as being somewhat beyond the 'most cases' to which Tlhagali refers, given that African ancestral, biblical and Western Christian traditions are on speaking terms in the piety and praxis of the communities, it would nonetheless be an unsustainable exercise at this stage to seek to write a fully-developed inter-traditional ancestral hermeneutics on the basis of the research done to date. What may be said is that the theological discourse of rural communities foregrounds the presence and role of both the ancestors and God in their struggles for land restitution, a presence that is communicated most powerfully at the graves of the ancestors and a role that includes the empowering (re)radication of the communities in the soil of their ancestral land.

In addition to the question of inter-traditionality, which will be taken up in more detail in the following chapter, the limitations of ancestral hermeneutics in the areas of genealogical specificity and patriarchy must be given careful consideration. Clearly, an ancestral hermeneutics that confines itself to the lineage of a single progenitor is of limited service to the TLRC communities' inclusive vision of a shared land; the inclusivity and relationality of grounded hermeneutics require that ancestral hermeneutics be opened up to include the ancestors of the other(s), so that what would otherwise be a mutually-exclusive multiplicity of discreet ancestral genealogies is broadened to include all. Differently put, there is a danger in ancestral hermeneutics of linking God in a particularist way to a given people and their land - a danger which poses a distinct threat to the inclusive vision of the communities. God may not be identified with any one people or ancestry; God may not be grounded in so particularist a way. To adopt an uncritical approach to ancestral hermeneutics at this point would be to invite comparisons with the particularist theological discourse of apartheid, and risk its exclusivity. With respect to biblical hermeneutics, there is a sense in which the move from the Hebrew Bible to the New Testament; from the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to God the Father of us all; from Matthew's genealogy, which traces the lineage of Jesus through David to Abraham, to Luke's genealogy which traces his lineage through David and Abraham to Adam, the 'son of God,' is apposite.<sup>70</sup> As Buti Tlhagali notes with respect to the move from African ancestral tradition to African Christianity, 'Through baptism Christians are incorporated into a much larger family which we call the body of Christ ... This cuts across the specificity of any particular clan's ancestors. The power and authority of God in Christ extends to all Christians

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<sup>70</sup> In this connection see K. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and Other Deities in Ancient Israel*, San Francisco, 1990; and H. Brichto, 'Kin, Cult and Afterlife - A Biblical Complex,' *Hebrew Union College Annual* 44, 1973, 1-54. The thesis that the *Elohim* were tribal deities, and that they were over time incorporated or subsumed (with varying degrees of success) into a national cult of Yahweh is an intriguing and relevant one for a

and all families' (1994:10). For Tlhagali this means two things: 1) 'in the light of Christian faith the ancestors cease to be the basis of the religious experience of the African,' and 2) this does not mean that the ancestors must be abandoned: 'the role of the ancestors is reduced, but not rejected.' Exploring this role, Tlhagali states:

It is fair and reasonable to believe that the deceased continue to be concerned about the welfare of their descendants. But now we can see that the ancestors themselves are also answerable to God ... The role of our ancestors, according to the gospel, can be seen in the parable of the rich man who after his death pleads with Lazarus to be allowed to go back to his family, his five brothers, to warn them about the dangers of wealth (Luke 16:27).<sup>71</sup>

While there are members of the TLRC communities who are not Christians, the majority have been engaged in an intercultural traditioning process, and affirm their religious-cultural identity as being African Christian. Many of the leaders in the communities are clergy and lay leaders in their churches, mainline and indigenous alike. Tlhagali's argument for a larger family in Christ, beyond the particularity of any one clan's ancestors, serves as an engaging invitation to the wide embrace of a God who is the God of all.

Buti Tlhagali's choice of biblical text is useful with respect to a further limitation: the description of the rich man's family as 'his five brothers' signals the patriarchal bias in ancestral hermeneutics, a limitation that has been discussed above in chapter one, and to which we will return in chapters four and seven.<sup>72</sup>

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critical ancestral hermeneutics. The New Testament may then be seen as further widening the embrace of such a God beyond the nation of Israel to all humankind.

<sup>71</sup> Buti Tlhagali, 'Rites, Ancestors and Christian Faith,' *Challenge* 26, 1994, p.10. Father Tlhagali is the Director of the Education Opportunities Council and a parish priest in Soweto. His article is the first in a projected series, dedicated to the memory of the late Xolile Keteyi who, before his untimely death, was working on inculturation issues.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 4, 'The Conflict of Patriarchies in Local Struggles for Ancestral Land,' and Chapter 7, 'Women's Hermeneutics in Local Struggles for Land Restitution.'

## CHAPTER 3

***Borapedi* and Praxis in Local Struggles for Ancestral Land**

As believers in God we never lost hope that our land would come back to us, because God is on our side. The ancestors are part of that. They are inside it - the process by which God is restoring the land to us. We are like that. That is our culture.

Alexander Monnakgotla, Bakubung ba Ratheo,  
Return to Ancestral Land, 1 March, 1994.

In the case of Mogopa, the ministers of the SACC, Tutu included, committed themselves to go and make a prayer there. No matter that they were removed, the prayer stood there until they returned.

Mam Beauty Mkhize, Rural Women's Movement,  
Driefontein, 25 August, 1994.

This chapter is concerned with the relation between *borapedi* (piety) and praxis in the land struggles of rural communities. Overlooked in most analyses of the issue of land restitution, a praxis-oriented faith in a God who suffers with the dispossessed and who acts in history to liberate and to transform has played a major role in the resistance and restoration campaigns of landless communities. The chapter documents and discusses the *borapedi* of community members and leaders with respect to issues of ancestors, land and health; the theological ethics of peace, rain and abundance/bloodshed, drought and poverty; and the linkages made between prayer and praxis, spirituality and strategy, in the land returns of the Bakwena ba Mogopa and Bakubung ba Ratheo communities. A selective presentation of material drawn from group and individual interviews and participant observation in the communities comprises what we may call the first voice of the chapter. The second voice is that of leaders of African Indigenous Churches and Black African theologians studied and interviewed in the course of the research. Through the interaction of first and second voices the chapter seeks to explore the praxiological significance of the *borapedi* thus documented. Throughout, the relation between local piety and praxis, relating religio-cultural aspects of land restitution to socio-economic and political aspects, is seen to further our understanding of the multivalent integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution.

### 3.1 Borapedi, Inclusive Relationality and Inter-traditionality

While the English word piety has suffered in certain Western contexts from an exclusive emphasis on a private spirituality that regresses from the personal to the individualistic, the Sotho noun *borapedi*, derived from the verb *ho rapela*, to pray, is relatively free from such a reductive prejudice. *Borapedi* comprehends what we may call a holistic spirituality: at once individual and communal, contemplative and active. Rooted in the act of prayer, *borapedi* points beyond the act itself to a way of life characterised by an indomitable and creative strength of spirit.<sup>1</sup> It is both articulate and silent, listening with ears attuned to the middle distance between the revealed and the ineffable, watching with eyes that search for the presence of God in the lives and history of the community, searching the signs of the times for God's *kairos*, and preparing spiritually and strategically to participate in that *kairos*. *Borapedi* is manifest and it is hidden, and when manifest is so in both the discourse and praxis of the *badumedi*, those who believe.

A key expression of the *borapedi* of the TLRC communities is thus to be found in prayer as a medium of divine-human relationality, involving thanksgiving, confession, supplication, intercession, exhortation, celebration and spiritual empowerment. The prayers of community members, as will be seen below, are addressed variously to God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and to the ancestors, as parents and intermediaries, who are called to remember the plight of their children and pass their cries on to the older ancestors and the 'Higher God.' Inter-traditionality is one of the chief characteristics of the prayer discourse of the members of the TLRC communities, especially with respect to their prayers concerning the land. The same prayer may begin with the grandparents and younger ancestors in their mediatory role with respect to older ancestors, and then move on 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' to appeal to the Holy Spirit and 'God the Father Almighty,' as was the case in many of the prayers of the Bakubung ba Ratheo. Alternatively, prayers may begin with an address to Jehovah, and then move to the ancestors, as was the case with Daniel Molefe of the Bakwena ba Mogopa. The expression of outrage and hope, suffering and celebration, grief and compassion, nightmare and dream in prayer has been at the heart of an inter-traditional spirituality closely connected to the land. The land and its people, inclusive of the ancestors

<sup>1</sup> The word *borapedi* may be seen as having two parts: the prefix *bo* + the root verb *ho rapela*. The prefix *bo* forms a substantive which generalises the quality, state of being, or identity indicated by the root word. The Sotho word for Christianity, for example, is formed by employing the prefix with *Kreste* (Christ), hence *bokreste*. In the same way the word *botho*, human-ness (the Sotho counterpart to the Nguni word *ubuntu*; increasingly the two appear together as *ubuntu-botho*), is formed by employing the prefix *bo* with the word for person, *motho*. *Borapedi*, then, while broader in connotation than its verbal root, is closely related to the act of prayer, both in its individual and communal expressions.



and the yet-to-be-born, have been bound together in prayer as an expression of *borapedi*: at graveside, under trees, in homes and in churches, both on the land and away from it, in mother tongues and in foreign tongues, in ones and twos, in congregations and community meetings, in regional workshops and national conferences. *Prayer as a medium of inclusive relationality* has played a key role in bringing people together following the scattering of community members that resulted from the forced removals and relocations under apartheid.

It is of the essence of *borapedi* that it is relational and inclusive. It is born and nurtured within a relationship between and among those who pray and those to whom and through whom they pray. In the case of the TLRC communities this relationship is inclusive of current generations, the ancestors and God. As will become clear below, God is best represented in the discourse of communities which speak Sotho, Tswana and Pedi by the name *Modimo/Jehovah*, given the inter-traditional dynamic in the piety of the communities, wherein God is addressed in both African traditional and biblical terms. In addition to the relationality indicated by the biblical and Trinitarian language of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we have the inter-traditional relationality of God as *Mo<sup>tsi</sup>mo/Jehovah*. There is thus a sense in which the inter-traditionality evident in the naming of God in the *borapedi* of the communities may be seen as part of its inclusive relationality. Illustrative of inter-traditionality as an aspect of inclusive relationality is the prayer of George Monnakgotla on the occasion of the celebration of the return of the Bakubung to their ancestral land. Kneeling at the grave of his forefather, Solomon Monnakgotla, he begins his prayer as follows: 'We are asking from our ancestors to plead for us to our higher God.' His approach is very much in keeping with Tswana tradition, as captured in a proverb quoted often in the interviews: *medimo e menyane re rapelle go medimo e megolo*; smaller/younger gods, pray for us to the greater/older gods. Having begun by addressing his ancestors in their mediatorial role, George Monnakgotla concludes his prayer in the name of Jesus Christ: 'Thank-you our God (*Modimo*). Bless everything, from the beginning of this return up to now, in the name of Jesus Christ, who has led us to this place. Amen.'<sup>2</sup>

While there is much that is indistinct in the inter-traditionality of local piety, it may be said that for most Christians in the communities, the respective mediatorial roles of the *badimo* and those of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit are not seen as being mutually exclusive. That said, however, it is no easy matter to determine in what way(s) they are viewed as being mutually *inclusive*, save to note that all participants in the research were at pains to ensure that

<sup>2</sup> George Monnakgotla, Molotestad, 28 May, 1994. See the prayer in its entirety below, in the discussion of the return of the Bakubung ba Ratheo to Molotestad.

it was understood that traditional respect for parents and veneration of ancestors in no way constituted 'ancestor worship' - that it was God (*Modimo/Jehovah*) and not the ancestors whom the people worship.<sup>3</sup> It is thus necessary to preserve a clear distinction between the ancestors and *Modimo/Jehovah* in the *borapedi* of the communities. At the same time, this distinction is not a dichotomy, for the intercultural and inter-religious dynamics at work do not admit of so neat an analysis: the respective traditions, mutually interactive, condition each other. While the ancestors (*badimo*) are understood to be deceased parents (and thus 'merely people'), they are also understood to participate in the numinous quality of the spirit world, as signalled in the sharing of a common etymological root with *Modimo* (Setiloane 1986:17-19). Thus, while they are not worshipped (the suggestion is strongly resented), the experience of their presence is that of *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* (Setiloane, following Otto, 1986:19). Further, thinking of the relation between *borapedi* and praxis, the enabling capacity of the inter-traditionality of local piety does not admit of a disempowering dissection of its constituent traditions. As will be argued below, theological inter-traditionality may be seen as part of the inclusive relationality which characterises the *ubuntu-botho* of the communities, and thus as an integral aspect of their communal strength. This is not to obviate the distinctions made by community members between and among the constituent traditions in the inter-traditionality; it is rather to argue that any analysis which seeks to make explicit that which is implicit in the *borapedi* of the communities must proceed with caution, respecting the piety of the people *as expressed*, in the knowledge of its importance for past and present struggles and challenges. The word 'traditional' must itself be used with caution: the interactive plurality of the traditions involved (African, biblical and Western) cautions us against assuming either a specific content or a fixed form for the traditional in each tradition. The dynamic indicated by

<sup>3</sup> Differences of belief and experience with respect to the roles of the ancestors and Jesus Christ sometimes surfaced within the same interview. In Dinkwanyane, for example, and again in Leroro, the role of the ancestors was both valorised and disparaged. One man in Dinkwanyane, a former headmaster of a local school, linked an exclusive belief in Christ with what he saw as the 'progress' represented by Western Christianity over the traditional ways of his fathers, which he saw as having been eclipsed or surpassed. A minority view in the interviews, his view is nonetheless significant, and calls for a careful approach to questions of inter-traditionality and interculturalisation. It is as errant to say that all members of all communities believe in the mediatorial role of the ancestors as it is to say that all members of all communities believe in the mediatorial role of Jesus Christ and/or the Holy Spirit. That most express a belief in both raises many questions, which if pursued may well open up an exciting and valuable dialogue of traditions much needed in South Africa. Of course, it may not be assumed that all members of all communities are believers, *badumedi*, one way or the other. At the same time, it may be said on the strength of prayers, rituals and liturgies witnessed and participated in during the research that a strong belief in the mediatorial role of the ancestors, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit is shared to a large extent in the communities, and has played a major role, personally and communally, over the years in the struggle to return to the land.

the word 'traditionality', as distinct from the word 'tradition', calls us to reject a view of tradition as a static deposit, unresponsive to the ongoing interpretative process.<sup>4</sup>

A dynamic sense of traditionality as a formal dialectic of temporal distance between sedimentation and innovation in the transmission of the past, and of tradition as a material dialectic of contents, involving a mutual interrogation of present and past horizons (Ricoeur 1988: 222-228), is important for the interplay between and among African, biblical and Western traditions in the inter-traditionality of the *borapedi* of the TLRC communities. Both the respective traditions themselves, and the inter-traditional dynamics between and among the traditions, may be seen as being in a state of hermeneutical flux (where the interaction is implicit) and of hermeneutical negotiation (where the interaction is explicit), making for a dynamic hermeneutical context of engagement and interrogation, enabling mutual exploration, critique and 'innovation'. The rural womanist critique of the patriarchy and androcentricity of African, biblical and Western traditions concerning land, for example, may be seen in this light to be participating in the dialectic of traditionality, giving subversive direction to the 'innovation' necessary. The voices and praxis of rural women are *interrupting* and interrogating the systemic patriarchy of their tradition(s), struggling for the transformation of tradition in the direction of an egalitarian relational humanity. Rural women are taking advantage of the liberative potentialities offered by a dynamic and critical approach to tradition, traditionality and inter-traditionality in a period of transition.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Paul Ricoeur's discussion of traditionality, tradition and Tradition is apposite at this point. In Volume III of *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur describes traditionality as a dialectic between 'sedimentation' and 'innovation,' signalling a hermeneutically dynamic transmission of the past to the present. Neither a negation of history nor a homologisation of memories and histories, Ricoeur's traditionality proposes instead a fusion of horizons (following Gadamer) in which our present horizon engages the past as an historical horizon, the two remaining distinct yet interlocked in mutual interrogation. Traditionality as a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation in the transmission of the past, moving towards the fusion of past and present horizons, views the 'temporal distance which separates us from the past not as a dead interval but as a generative transmission of meaning' (Ricoeur 1988:228). Thus traditionality has to do with a 'formal dialectic of temporal distance.' Tradition, on the other hand, has to do with a 'material dialectic of contents,' a dialectic occasioned by the interpretative process itself, for traditions refer to 'those things said in the past and transmitted to us through a chain of interpretation and reinterpretation' (1988:222). In this material dialectic of contents the past interrogates the present before the present interrogates the past, and in this 'struggle for the recognition of meaning' the tradition and the interpreter 'are each in their turn familiarised and defamiliarised' (1988:222). Commenting on Ricoeur's argument, Richard Kearney observes that, 'Ricoeur relates the essence of traditions to the fact that the past interrogates and responds to us to the degree that we interrogate and respond to it. To conceive the past in terms of traditions is to conceive of it in terms of proposals of meaning which, in turn, call for our interpretative response' (Kearney, in Wood 1991:60). Ricoeur's third category of the historical past, Tradition (*La tradition*), focuses on the truth claims of traditions, observing that every proposal of meaning may be seen to be a claim to truth. A critical hermeneutics of tradition, able to weigh rival truth claims, is thus required, and for Ricoeur the hermeneutics of tradition contains within itself the capacity for ideological critique.

<sup>5</sup> How we discriminate between true and false interpretations of the past becomes a major issue at this stage. To what extent must the criteria by which we decide be grounded within the historicity of tradition and to what extent must they be free from the ideological bias which inheres in that historical binding? In light of this

Turning specifically to theological traditions and traditionality, the growing influence of what has been called the self-theologising dynamic in African churches is significant in local theological discourse concerning land.<sup>6</sup> The self-theologising exploration of contextuality and liberation, interculturalisation and inter-traditionality, in South Africa has already begun to close the gaps between Black, African and Prophetic theology in both mainline and indigenous churches. Yet even the self-theologising efforts are themselves proceeding with caution, as they must, lest the new theology, however contextual, be yet another theology written and proclaimed by a theological elite, with insufficient participation in its articulation by local believers (*badumedi*) themselves.<sup>7</sup>

Notwithstanding a degree of indeterminacy in discerning the *norma normans* from the *norma normata* in the inter-traditionality of local *borapedi*, prayers like that of George Monnakgotla (above) indicate clearly the belief, however variously articulated, that both God (*Modimo/Jehovah*) and the ancestors have played a major role in the resistance and restoration struggles of those who were dispossessed under apartheid. While a systematic investigation of the inter-traditional dynamics and understandings which may be discerned in the *borapedi* of community members is beyond the scope of the present study, it is incumbent upon a grounded theology of land restitution to listen to and explore the significance of the prayer life, religious

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debate, the question for a grounded hermeneutics is not only what role history and tradition play in local theologising but also whether and to what extent that role is implicit and unexamined, or explicit and subject to critique from within. It is at this point that the rural womanist critique of the patriarchy in ancestral tradition may be seen as having theoretical as well as praxiological significance.

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion in David Bosch, 'Toward a New Paradigm of Mission,' in the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 14:4, October, 1990, pp.149-152. Bosch discusses contextualisation in theology under two heads, liberation and inculturation, eschewing in the case of the latter the older terms 'accommodation,' 'adaptation' and 'indigenisation,' and moving in the direction of 'in(ter)culturalisation.' In his critique of where Protestant 'indigenisation' has been, Bosch discusses the need to move beyond the three-self ideal, wherein the 'younger' churches were to become self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. The West, bearing a largely 'supra-cultural' gospel, was blind to the ways in which its theology was culturally conditioned. 'A fourth "self", self-theologising, is only now being added,' states Bosch. 'For a long time any form of self-theologising almost automatically meant a schism from the mother body and the formation of an "independent" church. Now, however, self-theologising is taking place also within the traditional "mission" churches, Catholic and Protestant' (p.150). Bosch develops the three major themes of the article (mission as contextualisation, as common witness, and as action in hope) more fully in his magisterial work, published a year later, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1991.

<sup>7</sup> The current writing project of the African Spiritual Churches Association is progressing very slowly precisely because of the need to consult all of the congregations of all of the member churches, virtually line by line, paragraph by paragraph, before the published theology may be said to be a true 'speaking for ourselves.' See also the narration of the participatory process which lay behind the *Kairos Document*, and the discussion of the ongoing importance of this process in the Preface to the second edition (1986). A similar process is narrated at the beginning of the *Evangelical Witness in South Africa* of the Concerned Evangelicals (1986), and the importance of such a process is again underlined in *Speaking for Ourselves*, published conjointly by the African Spiritual Churches Association and the Institute for Contextual Theology (1985). See also Charles Villa-Vincencio's participatory model for a 'theology of reconstruction' in the final chapter of his *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights*, Cambridge, 1992.



ritual and liturgical practice of the communities insofar as these have been part of the struggle of the communities to return to their ancestral land and to re-root themselves in it.

### 3.2 Ancestors, Land and Life: The Moletele

Returning to the Moletele of the Eastern Transvaal, Petrus Makhubedu has already signalled that there is more to the significance of the graves of the ancestors than that which may be read from their explicit textuality. Referring to the *Memorandum of Landless Communities* of 25 June 1993, I asked about the first of the statements concerning the graves: 'We demand that we be allowed to return to the graves of our ancestors, as our traditions call us to do. No other land can be compensation for what we lost.' At this point the interview moved to a more overtly religio-cultural approach to the graves and their significance for the struggle of the Moletele.

**Petrus Makhubedu:** We are compelled to go to those graves and venerate our forefathers. If they give us another land it is another oppression. Because the whites refuse us permission to go to our forefathers' graves. Also, sometimes on a different land the ancestors of those people will refuse us many things.

**Barnas Mashego:** According to our tradition, we have a belief that we must be near our ancestors, where we can disclose to them our problems. We believe that if we are near to our ancestors, when we have problems they can be solved. That is if we are close to our ancestors.

**Q:** You are still in communication with your ancestors?

**Barnas Mashego:** If you settle me in a different land, far away from my ancestors, it is as if now you have taken off my clothes, and I'll be caught by cold. But if I am near to my ancestors I feel myself to be warm, because I believe they help me when I am close to them. Because in any problem I feel they are protecting me. I believe that if I have problems and I am far away from my forefathers, these problems could have been solved if I was near them.

**Elphas Thete:** Let me put it this way: if you are far from your ancestral graves you will be having difficulties. Big ones. Children will be crying. Who will I tell? If I am far from my ancestors? Because the place where I am supposed to go and tell my forefathers I cannot go. I cannot even squeeze myself in, slip in, because the whites refuse to allow me. So a child cries until the end.<sup>8</sup>

The question of the acceptability of compensatory land over ancestral land is a spiritual and theological question in the speeches of Makhubedu, Mashego and Thete. The statement, 'If they give us another land it will be another oppression,' points clearly to a multi-faceted oppression which includes inherently the oppression of religio-cultural traditions concerning the ancestors, offending and obstructing the *borapedi* of the community. It is for this reason that Archbishop TW Ntongana, President of CAIC and for a term a member of ACLA, speaks graphically of the forced removals as a *castration* and as an *uprooting* of

<sup>8</sup> Moletele Group Interview, 3 February, 1994, unpublished, p.5.

communities from their land and their ties to it, both visible and invisible. The forced removals did violence to those linkages, uprooting the traditional life-lines between the ancestors and the current generations of the community:

In African tradition if you by-pass the ancestors you are cast out. There is nowhere you can go ... So, if you move the people from where their graves are you are *castrating* them! Uprooting them!

... When it comes to land we Africans do not divorce the physical from the spiritual. If you touch one you touch the other. That is why the communities say the government cannot give them any other land - because the place of the ancestors, of the family, is very important. That is why I say the removals were nothing short of an uprootal...

That is why the removal is so painful and violent a thing for an African. Some even died when they arrived at the new place. For example, in evidence given to ACLA, one woman spoke of her parents. They died immediately upon arrival at the new place. She wept bitter tears. It was an uprootal of spirit and of body. An uprootal of life.<sup>9</sup>

The removals did violence to the entire community of past, present and future generations, thus striking at the relational heart of *ubuntu-botho*.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, the discourse and praxis of the communities today as they return to their lands indicate clearly that, however attenuated the ties with the land and the ancestors became as a result of forced removal and relocation, that process did not reach the point of no return. To pursue Archbishop Ntongana's metaphor, what was uprooted can be replanted in the land.

Petrus Makhubedu's discourse concerning the importance of being close to the ancestors for protection, warmth, health and healing raises the question of the significance of location with respect to the graves of the ancestors. Physical proximity to the graves is believed to be directly related to warmth and healing; conversely, living at a distance from the graves is related to vulnerability, coldness ('you have taken off my clothes'), illness ('I'll catch cold') and the death of children ('so a child cries until the end'). His discourse is representative of beliefs shared throughout the communities: the ancestors are present in an especially efficacious way at or near their grave sites, which are themselves located within the community

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, Jabulani, Soweto, 17 December, 1993, unpublished, pp.1-5.

<sup>10</sup> As discussed in chapters one and two, *Ubuntu* (Nguni) - *botho* (Sotho/Tswana) expresses the belief and commitment that being human is a being-in-community, that it is not possible for a person to be human alone, for it is of the essence of being human that we are so with, through and because of others. *Ubuntu-botho* is expressed in the proverb: *motho ke motho ka batho ba bang* (Sotho/Tswana); *umuntu ungumuntu ngabanye abantu* (Nguni): a person is a person through other people. For a theological treatment see Gabriel Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction*, Johannesburg, 1986, pp.9-16, 41. 'John Mbiti,' affirms Setiloane, 'was right when he changed the Cartesian dictum to, "I belong, therefore I am."' For a narrative presentation of the importance of *ubuntu-botho* in the life of a community, see 'A Person is a Person Because of Another Person' and 'Lasting Impressions' in Ellen Kuzwayo, *Sit Down and Listen*, Cape Town, 1990, pp.111-123. For a discussion of *ubuntu-botho* in relation to the challenge of transforming landscapes, mental and physical, of poverty see Francis Wilson and Mamphela Ramphele, *Uprooting Poverty: The South African Challenge*, Cape Town, 1989, pp.269ff.

- often at the family homestead in or near the kraal.<sup>11</sup> They respond to cries for assistance in times of trouble, enjoy being thanked in times of healing and liberation, and require that traditional services of respect be rendered. Moreover, with respect to the relationship between venerating the ancestors and worshipping God, Petrus Makhubedu, an evangelist who in the first interview saw the Lamentations of Jeremiah as a 'witness to our sufferings,' made it clear in the second interview three months later that, 'To become a member of the church is *not* to destroy the national identity. It is only to show people what God wants':

**Petrus Makhubedu:** Let me put it in this way. The life of our people, black people, has another way of contributing - like paying homage to our ancestors (*badimo*). And to report to our ancestors, and do whatever is necessary. But, according to the law of the church, it does not accept that we should do this. There are specific people, particular relatives, who are supposed to render this service, do these rituals. But we, even if we are ministers, we are the blood relatives of those specific people. We also have the chance to play our role, to do these rituals together with them. Because those ancestors (*badimo*) to whom they are paying homage are also our ancestors. That is why today we are gathered here with ministers. We are the nation. To become a member of the church is not to destroy the national identity (*bo-sechaba*). It is only to show people that which God (*Modimo*) wants. Now, according to our tradition we ask permission in the church from God to do these rituals. In our prayers we say: God we are here today. We ask your permission to do our traditional rituals. We ask forgiveness for any misconduct. Furthermore, we say '*re buile se kgethweng*', we are back from the sacrifice.<sup>12</sup>

Christian ministers are part of the nation and thus part of the community of land and people. Far from seeing and practising Christian ministry as something that destroys the national identity, Makhubedu participates in rituals of respect and veneration of the ancestors. The worship of God (*Modimo/Jehovah*) does not preclude the performance of traditional services for the ancestors, just as the performance of those services does not mean that the ancestors are being worshipped.

The importance of the ongoing communication between the people and their parents and ancestors was affirmed throughout the communities. With respect to physical closeness

<sup>11</sup> Maria Mothopi of Mogopa, for example, addressed the issue of the need to be close to the ancestors by positing the following scenario: 'Let's say someone from Mogopa died and was buried at Bethanie. If someone from her family wishes to speak with her, she must get a transport and go to Bethanie. By this example I am highlighting the importance of being close to the ancestors. They have powers and we cannot live without them. It is the same with God.' For a recent treatment of the role of the ancestors in community life see Obed Kealotswe, 'Doctrine and Ritual in an African Independent Church in Botswana: a study of the beliefs, rituals and practices of the head Mountain of God Apostolic Church in Zion,' unpublished PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Bright Mashego, while translating the interview, offered the thought that, '*re buile se kgethweng*' is said in place of the 'Amen', indicating that the ritual acts are already envisioned in the prayer of supplication (asking permission) and confession (asking for forgiveness). Petrus Makhubedu is perhaps conflating, or compressing the times in his prayer, or speaking proleptically of the immediate future as being already present.

and relationality in prayer, and the efficacy of prayer for healing, Daniel Molefe of Mogopa spoke of his mother, her ancestors and God:

Today I have an elderly mother who is sick and blind, and unable to walk. The ancestors want her. It forces me to take her to her own mother's grave, where she kneels down and prays to her mother. She prays to God (*Modimo*) and to her ancestors (*badimo*). She starts by praying to God, to ask God, and then she also prays to ask her ancestors - so that they can help her be healed and have peace in her life...

When I pray at night I always call my father and mother, because I have a connection with them through dreams - even though they are late. Sometimes I can see them coming to me in the middle of the night - because that is our tradition. They tell me what to do and what not to do. That is the blessing that happens to me.<sup>13</sup>

Bishop Paul Makhubu, Director of the Khanya African Independent Churches Theological Training and Research Institute, confirms the communication between the ancestors and current generations of the communities, and describes the ongoing life of those who are said to be 'late' but not dead:

In our understanding we don't die. Our people don't die. They've just gone to the next world. To their ancestors. And we too, when we die, we don't die, we just pass on to be with them. To the land of the dead, you might say. But to us they are living, the ancestors. There is communication. I mean, they visit the people in dreams. The people go to the graves and talk to them. There is that communication. If you say, 'I dreamt my grandfather' - what was he saying?<sup>14</sup>

Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng of the African Spiritual Churches Association concurred with Bishop Makhubu: the ancestors are alive, and there is an ongoing relationship of obligation and reward which may be described as veneration and commemoration but not as worship. Further, because 'the land is very close to us - it has got our living dead in it,' the forced removals from ancestral lands are said to be nothing short of an uprooting of people:

**Archbishop Ngada:** To Africans the dead are the most respected. Well, even the term 'dead' to us does not apply to our people who have passed. They are not dead to us. They are alive. For after this mortal death the belief is that they are still living. Because anyone who passes away now, it is our belief that he is going to join those who have passed away before him. And to us they are alive. And their spirits are always with us. In everything that we do they are part of us. In the sense that we give credit to them for our livelihood. For our life.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Molefe, Group Interview with Members of the Mogopa Community, Mogopa, Western Transvaal, 30 June, 1994, unpublished, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Bishop Paul Makhubu, Wynrop House, Johannesburg, 8 December, 1993, unpublished, p.4. Bishop Makhubu, elaborating on the belief that the ancestors are alive, described the form of burial as one which facilitated the ongoing life of the person: 'The way we buried our people was not like today, in a box. Put the person in a box and bury the person. The grave was a place dug on the side of the burial place, and we let the person sit there ... upright, facing the east, the rising sun ... He was given certain of his belongings to take along with him ... his spears, shield, sticks ... his utensils ... The calabash for drinking was put with him' (p.4).



And for our prosperity. And even for our misfortunes. If you don't follow the tradition or the custom, then you are bound to have misfortunes, because you don't perform the customs and the norms of your ancestors.

That is not worshipping them. As far as people say there is what is called ancestor worship in the African culture - there is no such thing. It is not ancestral worship. It is that we venerate and commemorate, in actual fact we remember them and we give them their due respect that we need to give to parents or to those whom we don't see. We can't see them now because they are now spirits.

So I think the saying of the people who sent that memo to the negotiators at Kempton Park, I think it is along those lines that they say the graves of the ancestors are their title deeds. Because they were not supposed to be stripped of their land, because the land is very close to us because it's got our living dead in it. And it's where we have to perform all our customs...

**Q:** So, to be forcibly removed from your land and made to live in some far-off corner of Bophuthatswana or Lebowa or whichever, that is really wrenching your life.

**Archbishop Ngada:** You wrench, or you *uproot* these people!

**Q:** Yes.

**Archbishop Ngada:** And once you uproot a tree, and try to implant it somewhere else - ah ah! To a soil that it doesn't belong to - ah ah ah!<sup>15</sup>

For his part, Archbishop Ntongana speaks of an intimacy of communication through visions, wherein the vision is a medium of visitation, encounter and conversation. The forced removals, in shredding this intimacy, is thus spoken of as an uprooting, as noted above. Further, conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic analyses, Ntongana speaks of this uprooting as an 'economic strategy,' designed to impoverish people and thereby force them into waged labour on white farms:

An African believes that whenever he is hit by any problems, or also when he is hit by luck, it is very usual and common for this person to go to the grave of the father or the grandfather. Because he would have seen his great-grandfather appear to him in a dream or a vision. Let me say a vision. He may not have known his great-grandfather, but the one in the vision will identify himself: 'I am your great-grandfather, or great-grandmother.' So the correct thing to do is to go to the graves of the father and grandfather, to tell them of the visitation in the vision, and what was said.

So if you move the people from where their graves are you are uprooting them! The great troubles we are facing in this country are the direct result of these removals ... It was an economic strategy - to make the people poor by taking them off the land, so as to turn them into wage labourers on white farms. They had been independent, successful farmers, with fields, cattle, sheep and goats.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, African Spiritual Churches Association, ASCA Institute, Braamfontein, 20 September, 1994, unpublished, pp. 1, 8.

<sup>16</sup> Archbishop TW Ntongana, op cit., p.3. Ntongana is in good company in his conjoining of race and class analyses with respect to land and labour in South Africa. Leslie Hewson, for example, addressing a conference of the Christian Council of South Africa in 1949, just months after the first electoral victory of the National Party, declared; 'Land and labour! No one understands the complexities of the racial situation in South Africa until he has given due consideration to the significance of land and land hunger, until he has sought to understand the necessity for labour, and attempted to assess the exorbitant cost of what has been called "cheap" labour' (Hewson, in De Gruchy, 1986: 20). Francis Wilson, analysing the related factors of land and labour in government policy in South Africa since the Act of Union in 1910, with special reference to the policies of the National Party since 1948, came to the inescapable conclusion that, 'The heart of apartheid is dispossession' (Wilson, in Nash and Charton 1980:23).

The discourse of the Moletele and Bakwena on ancestors, land and life, and the commentary of Ntongana, Makhubu, Ngada and Mofokeng of the Independent and Spiritual churches, gives further definition to the inter-traditionality and multivalent integrality of local theological ethics with respect to land. The *borapedi* of the TLRC communities comprehends relational linkages between people, the ancestors, God and the land, and thus evidences in its articulation the linkage between the religio-cultural and the socio-economic and political in local struggles for ancestral land.

### **3.3 Toka, Khotso, Pula, Nala: A Theological Ethics of Justice, Peace, Rain and Abundance**

This section of the chapter documents the theological-ethical linkages made between and among justice (*toka*), peace (*khotso*), rain (*pula*) and abundance (*nala*) in rural communities experiencing drought on the land. The traditional Sotho ritual of communal benediction at the end of a public assembly, wherein the chief shouts '*Khotso!*', the people answer '*Pula!*' and all shout '*Nala!*' forms part of the cultural background to this movement of the thesis. These linkages were explored in detail in group interviews in drought-stricken areas. The converse linkages of bloodshed, drought and poverty were also foregrounded in the *borapedi* of the communities of the Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, where the relation between how people live and whether or not God and the ancestors send the rain was discussed with compelling urgency. The crucial importance of justice for peace, rain and abundance was argued in unforgettable fashion by elders of the *Ncoa-Khwe* (Red People/First People) of the Kalahari, for whom the rain, when it falls, 'falls for someone else,' because the land on which it falls has been unjustly taken from the *Ncoa-khwe* by others. Putting *toka* together with the *khotso, pula, nala* triad, we approach what we may call a grounded theological ethics of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (see below), and indeed of shalom, wherein peace and plenty are seen to be the fruits of a right relationship with God. The linkages made between *toka, khotso, pula* and *nala* present us with an important conjoining of religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses in the *borapedi* and praxis of rural landless communities, further defining the multivalent integrality of their struggles for ancestral land.

### 3.3.1 The Moletele: Rain and Ancestral Mediation

In the Moletele interview the themes of rain, peace and abundance are linked to the quality of the relationship of the community with God and the ancestors. The question of whether or not the rain falls is seen by Barnas Mashego and Petrus Makhubedu, and by many others in subsequent interviews, to be related to the way in which people live. Specifically, for the Moletele, that way was related to the veneration of the ancestors. 'If we follow this way,' says Petrus Makhubedu, 'we receive many rains and showers. If we don't follow this way we burn. No rain. That is why we are compelled to live next to our ancestors':

**Barnas Mashego:** If we are not in the place of our forefathers on the day we are supposed to go and pray for rain, we must go to that place. Also to pray for wealth I must go to them. If I am not in that place who will I ask for those things? Because there is no access there. The whites have blocked the way.

**Q:** You speak of praying for rain (*pula*) and wealth (*leruo, nala*). It puts me in mind of the way the Basotho conclude their public meetings with 'Khotso! Pula! Nala!; Peace! Rain! Abundance!' After the Chief has spoken he says 'Khotso!' The people answer, 'Pula!' And then all say 'Nala!' The order of the words seems to be very important. Abundance follows rain and the rain itself follows peace. Do you believe there is a connection between how people live and whether or not the rain falls?

**Barnas Mashego:** Do you mean how does the question of rain link up with the way people live? Or with beliefs in ancestors?

**Q:** Both.

**Barnas Mashego:** How people live greatly affects whether or not the rain falls.

**Petrus Makhubedu:** Let me come in here. This is the main issue that we link with. We have got a very strong link here. We went to our ancestors<sup>17</sup> to make sacrifices and pray. After we finish this we shout: *Pula! Pula! Pula! Rain! Rain! Rain!* After that we pray. From there we walk away. According to our belief, once the ancestors (*badimo*) have our message, then they send our message to God (*Modimo*). If we follow this way we receive many rains and showers. But if we don't follow this way we burn. No rain. That is why we are forced to live next to our ancestors.

Since we were forcibly removed from our forefathers' land there are no commands from the ancestors that we can fulfil. Because we cannot get access to the graves.<sup>18</sup>

The linkages between rainfall, abundance and the way people live thus receives a traditional ancestral interpretation in the Moletele interview: prayers and appeals must be made 'in the place of the ancestors,' and the ancestors themselves, in their mediatorial role, are then enjoined to communicate the prayers to older ancestors and ultimately to God. The blockage of

<sup>17</sup> 'Ancestrals' is the word Bright Mashego kept coming back to as we translated this passage in the interview. I have chosen to leave it as 'ancestrals' though the term lacks clarity. It could be that 'ancestral spirits' would be a better translation, but the word 'ancestrals' does convey something of the difficulty in translating between the languages and cultures involved - all translations being of necessity interpretations, and in this case a negotiated interpretation. The ancestors are grandparents, on the one hand, yet participate in the numinosity of divinity on the other. See the discussion entitled, 'Badimo - The Ancestors,' in Setiloane (1986:17-20).

<sup>18</sup> Moletele Group Interview, op cit., p.5-6.

access to the graves of the ancestors by whites thus obstructs the *borapedi* of the community: people are not free to pray where it is required and most propitious for them to do so.

### 3.3.2 Dingleydale: Peace and Rain, Bloodshed and Drought<sup>19</sup>

In the Dingleydale interview below, the linkage between *borapedi*, ethics and rainfall is extended to include questions of war and peace, wherein the shedding of blood is seen to pre-empt the fall of rain, so that the earth may not be made green because it is already being made red. A general belief in the relation between prayer, behaviour and whether or not the rain falls is well known in the Law, the Prophets and the Writings of the Hebrew scriptures,<sup>20</sup> and may be seen as one of the more significant aspects of the relation between *borapedi* and praxis with respect to the green issues of soil conservation and land-use planning, and the basic human issue of deriving a living from the land. *In effect, we are looking at a grounded approach to the related issues of justice, peace and the integrity of creation (jp/c/JPIC)<sup>21</sup> in the discourse on Khotso, Pula, le Nala of the communities.* It is a local, rural vision of shalom.

In a semi-arid and often drought-stricken region like the Northern Province Lowveld, religio-cultural linkages between rain and the ancestors, and theological-ethical linkages between peace, rain and prosperity, are experienced as crucial to the very survival of communities, affecting harvests, livestock and people alike. Dry-land farming on marginal lands is a desperate undertaking. That the 'homelands consolidation' policy of apartheid contributed greatly to the ecological marginalisation of the land, and that the white-farmers-

<sup>19</sup> See Group Interview With Dingleydale Farmers, Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, 6 April, 1994, unpublished.

<sup>20</sup> E.g. Deuteronomy 11:13-17; 1 Kings 16:29 - 18:46; Isaiah 5:1-7; Amos 4:7-8. The Deuteronomy text, instructing Israel to bind the law to their hearts as they enter the land, is particularly apposite: 'If you will only heed his every commandment that I am commanding you today--loving the LORD your God, and serving him with all your heart and with all your soul-- then he will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine, and your oil; and he will give grass in your fields for your livestock, and you will eat your fill. Take care, or you will be seduced into turning away, serving other gods and worshipping them, for then the anger of the LORD will be kindled against you and he will shut up the heavens, so that there will be no rain and the land will yield no fruit; then you will perish quickly off the good land that the LORD is giving you.'

<sup>21</sup> Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation (JPIC) is a programme of the World Council of Churches, adopted after its General Assembly in Vancouver in 1983. In South Africa the JPIC programme has received close attention, with the justice component taking centre stage, and the 'integrity of creation' viewed initially (in the mid to late 1980s) with some suspicion as a 'white' issue, potentially 'deflecting the struggle' of black South Africans for liberation. The question of Albie Sachs, quoted above, 'Do you have to be white to be green?' captures the suspicion succinctly (Sachs 1990). The grounded approach discussed here makes a rural Black African contribution to the debate, reinforcing the linkages signalled in the JPIC formulation. I use the small-case 'jp/c' to signal a local approach to the linkages made in the theology and praxis of the JPIC programme. See 'Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation - Global Overview, JPIC Consultation, Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, 22-25 October, 1989,' SACC, Johannesburg, 1989; and 'Minutes of the JPIC Workshop Held on 29-30 November 1990 at Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre,' SACC, Johannesburg, 1990.



first regime on the land concerning both the allocation of arable land and the control of access to and use of scarce water resources contributed greatly to the impoverishment and ill-health of thousands of black South African communities,<sup>22</sup> serves not to undercut but to underline the significance of the linkage between *borapedi* and praxis with respect to the greening or browning of the land. These linkages received their clearest expression in a group interview with 'betterment-scheme' farmers in Dingleydale, a 'deep rural' community between Acornhoek and the Kruger National Park.<sup>23</sup>

**Q:** I wish to ask about the drought (*komello*). The drought has lasted a long time now, how long is it?

**Lion Chiloane:** Three years: '91, '92, and '93.

**Willis Ngobe:** Today's '94. It's still drought. Four years.

**Q:** You have said that you pray to the ancestors and to God for rain.

**All:** Yes, it's that way, we do pray to them.

**Q:** In your view, how did the ancestors and God answer you at the time of the drought?

**Lion Chiloane:** We have begun to see some rain now. That little drop of rain that makes the grass to be green. The grass is green now - we can see that God has answered us.

**Male Voice:** We are from God's Window where we prayed for rain.<sup>24</sup>

**Q:** God's Window. The sacred place on top of the escarpment?

**Bright Mashego:** Yes. *Ra Khethuoe*.

**Different Voices:** No, it was not *Ra Khethuoe*. We went to a mountain closer to this place of ours here.<sup>25</sup>

**Q:** How many of you went to pray, and how did you go about it?

**Male Voice 1 (elderly):** Eeeeh! *Sechaba!* The whole community/nation.

**Male Voice 2:** Nearly a thousand.

**Male Voice 1:** Yes!

**Q:** Did the chiefs and the ministers go with you?

**Male Voice 1:** Yes. All. Everyone went!

<sup>22</sup> See the discussions in James Clarke, *Back to Earth: South Africa's Environmental Challenges*, Halfway House, 1991; Jacklyn Cock and Eddie Koch, eds., *Going Green: People, Politics and the Environment in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1991; and Mamphela Ramphele, ed., *Restoring the Land: Environment and Change in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, London, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> The group interview was conducted under the tree near the football field in Dingleydale, a farming community which was begun by the government (central) as a betterment scheme in the 1960s. It was initially divided into four wards, assigned to each of four chiefs (*kgoshis*), but in the late 1960s Dingleydale as a whole was declared to be part of Lebowa, and most of the Shangaan residents left, crossing the river into what had become Gazankulu. In the group gathered for the interview there are Sepulana, Sepedi, Seroka and Shangaan speakers. The 'homeland' boundaries in this part of the Lowveld, close to Kruger Park, are very much like a jigsaw puzzle, with some parts of Gazankulu completely surrounded by Lebowa, and at least one part of Lebowa surrounded by Gazankulu - an example of the absurdity and impracticability, as well as the injustice, of the 'homeland' consolidation policy of 'grand apartheid' under the Nationalist Party.

<sup>24</sup> God's Window is a point north of Graskop, now a look-off, along the Drakensberg escarpment where the Eastern Highveld falls abruptly towards sea-level. The drop is on average 1000 meters, and the view is of breath-taking beauty - one can see the whole of the central Lowveld, past Kruger Park to the Lebombo Mountains along the Mozambican border. It has long been regarded as a sacred place by the Mapulana, and, given the formation of clouds along the escarpment, a propitious place to offer prayers for rain.

<sup>25</sup> Throughout the Transvaal, communities indicated that while the gravesites were where you went to 'pray your ancestors' in general, the mountains were where you went to pray for rain.

**Q:** Yes. And what did you do?

**Male Voice 1:** We prayed. We sang. We prayed for rain to give us life and baptise us. In the name of the Lord (*Morena*).

**Q:** To baptise you in the name of the Lord!?

**Male Voice 1:** Yes to baptise us in the name of the Lord!

**Q:** *Morena Jesu?*

**Male Voice 1:** Yes, *Jesu*.

**Q:** Why 'baptise'?

**Male Voice 2:** God must guide humans, raise them up and educate them (*hodisa*: as parents bring up children).

**Q:** Do people believe that God might keep the rain back because there is evil that is being done?

**Several voices at same time:** Yes! *Ho joalo*. It is that way.

**Male Voice 1:** These things where people are fighting each other and there is killing and murder - God will stop the rain.

**Male Voice 2:** Because of the shedding of blood.

**Male Voice 3:** Because of the shedding of blood.

**Bright Mashego:** There is a lot of blood-shedding in this country.

**Q:** And the rain, or the drought, is linked to the bloodshed?

**Several Voices:** Yes.

**Willis Ngobe:** God is not happy about the shedding of blood in this country. That's why God stopped the rain.

**Q:** *Aow batho!*

**Willis Ngobe:** Yes.

**Q:** This is a very serious point!

**Willis Ngobe:** Yes!

**Q:** It reminds me of the Sotho practice of saying *Khotso! Pula! Nala!* at the end of public meetings with the Chief. I am thinking about the order of the words. Abundance follows rain, and rain follows peace. They seem to be related to each other in that way.

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes. They are related. They touch upon each other. They affect each other.

**Willis Ngobe:** They do relate to each other.

**Q:** Peace, rain and abundance.

**Willis Ngobe:** Yes.

**Q:** The matter of the behaviour of people touches on whether or there is rain.

**Several Voices:** Thank you! (*Thobela!*) You've got it.

**Q:** So that if we can make peace, it will bring rain.

**Male Voice 1:** Yes.

**Male Voice 2:** Yes, making peace will bring the rain.<sup>26</sup>

The statement, 'We prayed for rain to give us life and baptise us in the name of the Lord,' is a good example of the linkages made between the theological, ecological and ethical in the piety of the communities. That rain is seen to be life-giving is straight-forward enough, particularly during a time of drought; that the rain is, moreover, a 'baptism in the name of the Lord (*Morena Jesu*)' is perhaps less expected, and opens up a pathway of linkages which leads from the prayed-for baptism by rain to the relation between the drought and the ongoing bloodshed in the land. Rain as baptism is a cleansing and giving of life beyond the greening of the grass, for it is a cleansing from bloodshed that is envisioned. To pray for rain as baptism is

<sup>26</sup> Dingleydale Group Interview, 6 April 1994, unpublished, pp.13-16.

to confess the violence which marks the times, and to acknowledge that the drought is linked to the bloodshed. 'These things where people are fighting each other and there is killing and murder - God will stop the rain,' affirms one voice. Willis Ngobe, following the stark statement of Bright Mashego that 'there is a lot of blood-shedding in this country,' asserts, 'God is not happy about the shedding of blood in this country. That's why God stopped the rain.' Thus it is not enough in a context of drought to pray for God to send rain to water the earth; questions must be asked concerning why the rain has not been falling in season. The community must search itself; the nation must search itself. The linkages between peace, rain and prosperity, and conversely between bloodshed, drought and poverty, are affirmed in the *borapedi* of the Dingleydale community in a way which informs the search for a praxis of peace in a context of violence and drought.

With respect to the greening of the land, Lion Chiloane sees God in 'that little drop of rain that makes the grass to be green.' The farmers of Dingleydale see the answer to their prayers for an end to drought in the falling of rain, however little, and the greening of the grass, however slight. It is a tenacious faith. It is significant that 'everyone' went to pray for rain, the whole community, 'nearly a thousand,' including spiritual and political leaders. It is also noteworthy that the place of prayer for rain is a mountain close to the community and not the graves of the ancestors, a distinction made often in the interviews. The ascent, the physicality of going up (*hodimong*), especially if the mountain is high enough to catch the clouds, is an important part of the practice of prayer for rain. That the escarpment itself catches rain-bearing clouds moving upwards from the hot Lowveld to the cooler Highveld makes certain look-outs along its length, like *Ra Khethuoe*, propitious sites for communal rain rituals, which would include prayer, song and the sacrifice of an animal as indicated by Petrus Makhubedu in the Moltelele excerpt above. Further, the grammar of divinity in Sotho, Tswana and Pedi suggests a linkage between God (*Modimo*), the space 'above' (*hodimo*) and the heavens (*mahodimo*) - the root *dimo* shared in each case.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> For a critical approach to the etymology of 'Modimo' see the discussion in Gabriel Setiloane, *African Theology: An Introduction*, Johannesburg, 1984, pp.21-28. Setiloane criticises the early missionaries (e.g. Robert Moffat) for relating 'Modimo' to the root '-dimo' (as in *hodimo*: high, above; and *lehodimo*: heaven, sky), contending that '-dimo' itself is a permutation of 'the original African stem -dzimu', which denotes 'spirit or that pertaining to spirit' (1984:24). His contention has proved controversial however, and no consensus has been reached to date on the question of the etymology of *Modimo*. Whether the correlation between *Modimo*, *hodimo* and *lehodimo* among Sotho and Tswana speakers originates in a common etymological stem, reflecting a religio-cultural connection in the experience and understanding of the people, or as a mistaken connection made by the early missionaries, themselves influenced by the biblical language of transcendence, the relation between *Modimo* and the space above us, the heavens, is widespread throughout the regions of southern Africa wherein Sotho and Tswana are spoken.

### 3.3.3 The *Ncoa-khwe* of the Kalahari: 'When it rains it is for somebody else'

The importance of rain in Southern Africa can hardly be over-estimated, and the linkages between piety and land struggles in the Kalahari with respect to rain are instructive for the region in general. From the rock paintings of first peoples, which employ an extensive symbolic vocabulary for rain (e.g. depictions of 'he-rain' - a hard rain, and 'she-rain' - a gentle rain, and therefore the rain more to be prayed for), to the choice of the government of Botswana to call its unit of currency the '*Pula*' (Rain), the importance of rain is underlined throughout the region. At the same time, the justice or injustice of prevailing systems of land ownership and land use greatly affect the way in which even the rain is viewed. What good is the rain, it was asked in the Kalahari, when the land upon which it falls, and the harvest which it generates, is now in the hands of others who refuse to share it? In a group interview in the Kalahari at the farm D'Kar, near Ghanzi, a Nharo leader and trustee of the Kuru Development Trust spoke of prayer for rain as a site of struggle. In the course of describing the struggle of the *Ncoa-khwe* (literally: Red People, the First People of the Kalahari) for the recognition of their aboriginal identity and land rights in Botswana, Komtsha Komtsha aired a startling disavowal of the importance of rain for the *Ncoa-khwe*, given the seizure of their lands by the Batswana.:

**Komtsha Komtsha:** Even the rain is now useless to us. Because when it rains it is for somebody else. Because in the old days, when it rains we know that the food from the soil will come out. Then we would eat. Even the animals would eat. And it was happy days. So nowadays when it rains it's - (pause) - it's no use to us, because even when it rains it's for somebody else. Because they have kept everything for themselves now. Even the fruits. The wild fruits. And the animals. It's for others. The ancestors knew that it was very important for the rain to come. Because they know that when the rain comes they will eat the wild fruits. Everything - they will get a lot of food when the rain comes. Because every kind of plant will be producing fruits. Now, even when the grass grows, it is no use - because it grows for somebody else. We don't have land where we can use the grass.

**Q:** Do you still pray for rain?

**Komtsha Komtsha:** Although it is not important for us, the rain, we still pray for rain. But it's not important for us.

**Kamana Phetso:** Because of the reasons he has said.

**Q:** So in a way to pray for rain is also to pray for changes, so that the land can be accessible to all people.

**Komtsha Komtsha:** Yes. Yes, when the *Ncoa-Khwe* pray for rain, we pray rain for everybody. Not only for ourselves. And when the Batswana people pray, maybe they are praying for themselves only.

**Q:** Only.

**Komtsha Komtsha:** The Batswana ask rain from their Chief. The first President of Botswana, Sir Seretse Khama, they pray for him to give them rain. But we don't pray for somebody else to give. The *Ncoa-khwe* pray for God to give them rain ... When we pray, we pray to God for everybody. When the rain comes it will rain on their side only, because Sir Seretse Khama was from Batswana people.

**Q:** Aow.

**Komtsha Komtsha:** When we pray to God - when he gives us rain or when he gives us life - those people are taking that thing from us. They, they take our lives from us. And maybe



they want us to pray them.

**Q:** To pray to Sir Seretse Khama?

**Kamana Phetso:** To Batswana people! Because when we pray to God to give us rain or food, the Batswana people will take that food from us.

**Q:** Aow! So this is really a politics of praying for rain?!

[all laugh]

**Komtsha Komtsha:** The Batswana people are the politicians. Because when we pray, the Ncoa-khwe, we pray to God for everybody.

**Q:** Right. For everyone. Not discriminating.

**Kamana Phetso:** Yes.<sup>28</sup>

The linkages between and among peace, rain and prosperity are seen in Komtsha Komtsha's anguished analysis to be related inextricably to the question of justice. When the rains falls on land that has been unjustly appropriated and produces food that is for the restricted use of those who have taken the land, the matter of justice must be seen to be an inherent aspect of any prayer for rain. It is because their land has been taken that the rain 'falls for somebody else' and the life given by God is taken from the Ncoa-khwe. *The plight of the First Peoples of the Kalahari tells us, as no other story does, that there is a pressing need for dialogue between the spiritual and ethical linkages of Khotso, Pula, le Nala and the theological and praxiological linkages made by JPIC programme.* Using the Sotho word for justice, *toka*, we might then wish to call for a theological-ethical exploration of *Toka, Khotso, Pula le Nala* with respect to all experiences and issues of injustice connected with the land in Southern Africa.

Further, Komtsha Komtsha's discourse underlines the warning issued by Buti Tlhagali concerning the limitation of ancestral hermeneutics in struggles for land: there is a danger that the focus will be an exclusive one, dealing only with the specific lineage of the person praying, and thus functioning, whether intentionally or unintentionally, to divide people in their traditional *borapedi*. There is indeed a spiritual and ethical need to worship a God who is the God of all. As Komtsha Komtsha, eschewing the politics of race in prayer, concludes, 'When we pray, the Ncoa-khwe, we pray to God for everybody.'

<sup>28</sup> Group Interview with Komtsha Komtsha, Qgoma Qgomatcaa, Thopi Caru and Kamana Phetso, Nharo Elders and Trustees of the Kuru Development Trust, D'Kar, Ghanzi District, Botswana, 3 June, 1994. The Nharo spoke of what they called the apartheid which exists in Botswana, wherein the Batswana deny the Ncoa-khwe their identity as indigenous people, and do not respect their claim to ancestral lands. Cf. Alice Mogwe, *Who Was (T)here First? An Assessment of the Human Rights Situation of the Basarwa in Selected Communities in the Ghanzi District, Botswana*, Gaborone, Botswana Christian Council Occasional Paper No. 10, 1992; Komtsha Komtsha et al, Letter from the First People of the Kalahari to Mr C. Butale, Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing, unpublished, Ghanzi, Botswana, 17 May, 1992; B. Moeletsi, 'The San of Botswana: Legal Status, Access to Land, Development and Natural Resources,' unpublished paper delivered at the Second Regional Conference on Development Programmes for Africa's San Populations, Gaborone, Botswana, 11-13 October, 1993; and Kuru Development Trust, *Progress Report 1992-1993*, D'Kar, Ghanzi District, 1993.

### 3.3.4 toward a grounded theology of jpic

The foregoing cases and reflections serve to indicate the direction a grounded approach to *Toka, Khotso, Pula le Nala* might take - what we may in a wider context call a grounded approach to jpic. Archbishop Ntongana, responding to the '*Khotso, Pula, Nala*' triad and to the discourse of the TLRC communities on the importance of justice and peace for rain and prosperity, elaborated on the religio-cultural breadth and depth of the linkages:

**Archbishop Ntongana:** It is very important. In Xhosa the saying would be: *Uxolo! Invula! Ndyebo!* In Zulu it would be: *Ukuthula! Invula! Umcebo!* Now, the behaviour of people is paramount with respect to how God responds. We have it in the bible. If you repent, I will forgive. If you continue in your sins - no rain. I will shut up the heavens. Look at the career of Elijah for example.

Also, we prize the quality of rain-making in our chiefs. That is why Mandela went to the rain queen. I have been interested to know if my own chief, the chief of the Radebe clan of the Hlubis, is a rain-maker. Does he have such powers? Does he value them? King Langalibalele of the Hlubis was a very powerful rain-maker. Other chiefs would go to him. He had strong medicine for these chiefs. Strength and power.

**Q:** This is in such contrast with the 'rain technologists' in the Eastern Transvaal who tried to get rain from the clouds by using a cannon. They fired dust into the clouds, hoping the moisture would condense on the dust particles and it would rain. All that fell was hail! And it destroyed the crops that were there, struggling in the drought.

**Archbishop Ntongana:** I remember it well. At the time I denounced it in the press. I called it an interference with God by man. Like the tower at Babel.<sup>29</sup>

The grounded approach of rural communities to *toka, khotso pula le nala* is a compelling theological-ethical discourse, conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses, giving further shape to our understanding of the multivalent integrality of local struggles for ancestral land. What emerges is a grounded view of the prophetic community of people, land and God, the maintenance of which is imperative if there is to be peace and not bloodshed, a green and not a red earth, life and not death.

### 3.4 Borapedi and Praxis in Community Returns to Ancestral Land

The belief that both the ancestors and God (*Modimo/Jehovah*) played a major role in the resistance and restoration struggles of the communities is well attested in the speeches, prayers and ritual which attended the returns of the Bakwena ba Mogopa and the Bakubung ba Ratheo to their ancestral lands in the Western Transvaal. The *mekete* of the two communities,

<sup>29</sup> Archbishop Ntongana, op cit., p.6. Concerning chiefs as rain-makers, the visit of Queen Elizabeth to South Africa in March 1995 coincided with and/or occasioned heavy rainfalls throughout much of the country. She was accordingly given the prestigious name *Motlalepula*: She Who Brings Rain, by the Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki (cf. *The Times*, London, 25 March, 1995, front page).

following their returns, proved to be a rich source for a grounded theology in general and for the relation between *borapedi* and praxis in particular.

### 3.4.1 The Bakwena ba Mogopa: Prayer and Praxis I

The relation between the *borapedi* and praxis of the Bakwena ba Mogopa will be discussed in two sections. The first section is introductory in nature and seeks to document an experience and understanding of prayer as a medium of divine/human relationality, including *batho*, *badimo* and *Modimo/Jehovah*; the second is an exploration of what we will call a narrative *borapedi*, in that the linkages between the prayer and praxis of the Bakwena emerge in an oral narration of resistance and return on the part of members of the Mogopa vanguard.

#### 3.4.1.1 The Introductory Interview: Prayer as a Medium of Inclusive Relationality

In the first group interview with the Bakwena in Mogopa, Daniel Molefe discussed at length the importance of praying to the ancestors and God, highlighted the importance of prayer as a medium that united the Bakwena and God in the struggle for Mogopa. With penetrating honesty, Molefe also confessed the complacency which had begun to mark the piety of the Bakwena following the return:

We believe God helped us by prayer. Because at that time we were continuously praying. Although now we have become a bit slack concerning prayer. This is a complacency as a result of getting Mogopa back. Now, it was evident to everyone that prayer was a very important aspect of our struggle, which resulted in us getting Mogopa back. And we prayed to *Modimo* and *badimo*. Both helped us to return.<sup>30</sup>

The importance of praying to both God and the ancestors, was corroborated by all present:

**Maria Mothopi:** We do not pray only to the ancestors. We pray also to God (*Modimo*) - even in the graveyard.

**Caroline Tladinyane:** God (*Modimo*) as well. We are not excluding God. We pray to God and the ancestors.<sup>31</sup>

The question of the identity of the God to whom the Bakwena are praying arises with inescapable urgency at this point. Are the Bakwena praying to *Modimo*, *Jehovah*, or a relational combination, more implicit than explicit, as in *Modimo/Jehovah* suggested above? The inclusive relationality expressed in the prayer discourse of local *borapedi* supports the formulation *Modimo/Jehovah*, as does the translation of *Jehovah* as *Modimo* in Sotho and

<sup>30</sup> Group Interview with Bakwena ba Mogopa, 30 June 1994, unpublished., p.3.

<sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.3.

Tswana bibles. This serves only to move the question one step back, however. We must still ask, though perhaps it is a forlorn question, who and/or what *Modimo* was before the first missionaries arrived in Southern Africa. Conversely, we must also ask: who and what was *Jehovah* before the God of the bible came under the influence of *Modimo* in the *borapedi* and theology of the peoples of Southern Africa? Thus the '/' in *Modimo/Jehovah* faces both ways, indicating what I hope is a constructive ambiguity in the effort to express in text the inter-traditionality of local *borapedi*. Daniel Molefe, responding to the *Modimo/Jehovah* question, spoke of the difficulty of knowing how to answer at this remove from the beliefs of his foreparents:

When you come with this question of *Modimo* and *Jehovah* it is difficult for me to answer - because we were all born during the time of Christianity. But during the time of my youth, when Christianity was not so dominant, my grandfather - my father's father or my mother's father, I'm not quite sure - was an evangelist in the Lutheran Church. Now, you could not read the bible as it is read today; children did not read the bible at that time - it was a thing the adults did. My grandfather had a special place where he would go and read the bible. And he had another special place where he put a stone as a marker. Here he prayed and pleaded to God (*Modimo*). It was his special place of prayer, which he marked out for the purpose. This was his place where he could pray in secret ...

We know *Modimo* as the creator of the earth, people and all things. He is our father - because *Modimo* is the one who made us to be a people/nation (*sechaba*). And our parents (*batsoadi*) were also made by him. Therefore, when we come to pray to *Modimo* in secret we begin with him,<sup>32</sup> because he is the creator of all, including the parents and ancestors. Now according to our tradition, both the father and the mother are ancestors, there is no difference. The father and mother are not God (*Modimo*), but ancestors (*badimo*). So, we start with *Modimo*, and thereafter pray also to the *badimo*.<sup>33</sup>

Molefe's answer is significant in several respects. That his grandfather, a Lutheran evangelist, had two 'special places' with respect to his individual cultivation and expression of *borapedi*, one where he read his bible and one where he set up a stone and prayed in secret to *Modimo*, is a telling indication of the plurality of traditions in play. It may be a case of divided loyalties, the secrecy necessitated because the church would not have understood or approved

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the gender of the pronoun '*eena*' (third person, singular) with reference to *Modimo*: the translation 'him' was a negotiated one, with Lucas Kgatitsoe, a senior member of the Mogopa Community, arguing that while *eena* could be translated 'him' or 'her' in general, it was 'him' in the context of Daniel Molefe's speech concerning *Modimo*. The question of how best to translate the undesignated gender of Sotho, Tswana and Nguni pronouns into English, which requires that gender be assigned, recurred frequently, occasioning debate on each occasion. The formulation 'his/her' was seen by Lucas to be misleading in the context. The debate is a necessary one, and there is a compelling sense in which Sesotho and Setswana, Zulu and Xhosa offer a distinct opportunity for the development of a gender-inclusive language for God in Southern Africa. That the masculine gender seems to be assumed, even though it is not designated grammatically in the pronoun, must be faced as part of the patriarchal nature of theological language to date; however, it need not deter those who are seeking opportunities to liberate theological language from gender-exclusivity. The point also highlights the interpretative nature of all translation.

<sup>33</sup> op cit., p.2.



of the evangelist's prayers to *Modimo* in a place apart from that where he went to read his bible. Behind a 'divided loyalties' interpretation, however, and apart from any polemic which may be argued as part of an oppositional approach to the question of *Modimo/Jehovah*, it may well be a case of the evangelist needing spiritually to cultivate that aspect of his being that remained untouched by the Western Christian tradition in which he was now participating both as one affected by and one who was affecting that tradition. In the words of Archbishop Ntongana, 'The church did not accommodate all of our African selves.'<sup>34</sup> Daniel Molefe's grandfather, and scores of Sotho/Tswana-speaking evangelists like him, have played a major role in the dialogue of traditions, African, biblical and Western, wherein week by week they have articulated in their prayers and sermons in a largely Western-sourced liturgy a belief in the God of the bible, whom they call *Modimo*.

A second important feature of Daniel Molefe's speech quoted above is the issue of gender in his God-talk. On the one hand, in Tswana tradition both the father and mother are ancestors, 'there is no difference'; on the other, neither the father nor mother is *Modimo*. They are equal in their status as ancestors. Both the father and mother, as parents (*batsoadi*), were made by *Modimo*, the Creator, and thus are not to be worshipped. While Molefe struggled later in the interview with the demands of women for equal status in community decision-making bodies, and with their demands to own land in their own right, his inclusive approach to the ancestors, his experience of taking his mother to pray at graveside, and his own communication through dreams with both his father and mother indicates an openness to the inclusive relationality which is so much a part of the rural women's struggle. 'Inclusive' is not 'equal' of course, but openings must be tested for their spiritual and strategic significance. What may be said at this stage is that prayer as an expression of *borapedi* is a medium of community, inclusive of *batho* (mothers, fathers and children), *badimo* and *Modimo/Jehovah*, in which land plays a pivotal role as a nexus between *borapedi* and praxis.

### 3.4.1.2 The Vanguard Interview: A Narrative Borapedi

The theme of the relation between prayer and praxis in the struggle of the Bakwena for Mogopa was extensively explored in the second group interview, which brought together three of the original members of the vanguard of the return.<sup>35</sup> Following a suggestion made by

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Archbishop Ntongana, op cit., p.7.

<sup>35</sup> The names of the six original members of the vanguard are as follows: Ephraim Pooe (b.1905), Daniel Molefe (b.1925), Joseph Kgatitsoe (b.1929), Derek Ntsoe, Ndumi Manamela and Thakiso Tlhapi, of whom the first three were present for the interview, together with Joseph's nephew Lucas Kgatitsoe (b.1933), and Ephraim's nephew Jacob Pooe. The interview took place on weathered wooden benches beside Ephraim

Aninka Claassens, members of the vanguard of the return were asked to meet to discuss their theological reflections on the struggle for Mogopa, with specific reference to the role of God and the ancestors. Their narrative and analysis, and at times analysis in narrative form, comprise a rich discourse of local theological reflection.

The vanguard led the return of the Bakwena by re-occupying Mogopa in 1988 for the purpose of cleaning the graves of their ancestors. They then remained on the land, establishing a foot-hold that allowed additional members of the community to return in successive waves for the same purpose. In September of 1988, in response to the action of the community, the then Minister of Development Aid, Gerrit Viljoen, gave the community official permission to visit their graves on Swartrand. The government erected shacks, made of corrugated zinc and intended for single-sex occupation, to accommodate the growing number of returnees. They located these shacks at the graveyard, however. The people, disdaining the government's insensitivity, refused to occupy the shacks in accordance with their tradition that dwellings may not be constructed near a grave site. Instead, they camped out amid the ruins of Mogopa, building their own shacks on the foundations of their homes, which had been demolished in the removal.<sup>36</sup> The cleaning of the graves of the ancestors was seen as both a sacred duty and a strategic ploy. Its success can be seen not only in Mogopa but also in several communities which subsequently employed the same strategy; indeed, as has been seen above, the urban township of Alexandra had employed the strategy in 1979 in its campaign to win a reprieve from further removals.

We met in August 1994, ten days following the visit of the new Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, during which he had announced the return of Mogopa's second farm, Hartebeeslaagte.<sup>37</sup> The long struggle for the restoration of the land of the Bakwena ba

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Pooe's home. His home is constructed, as are most homes in Mogopa following the return, from sheets of corrugated iron nailed to wooden posts, assembled near the ruins of his original home. The iron sheeting is not new. Some of the sheets are the original 'zincs' which he took with him from his home when he was removed in 1984, others he picked up along the way. They have travelled with him to Pachedraai, Bethanie, Onderstepoort and back to Mogopa on the painful exilic path of those who resisted the removal. These sheets of corrugated iron, painted in part, rusting in part, rouged with the red dust of the Highveld, pierced with many nailings, tell their own story.

<sup>36</sup>Cf. *TRAC Newsletter* 23, August 1992, Transvaal Rural Action Committee, Johannesburg, 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Both farms, Swartrand and Hartebeeslaagte, are necessary for the prosperity and health of the Mogopa community. Swartrand is used for residence and grazing, and Hartebeeslaagte for ploughing. It was for this reason that the return of Swartrand on its own was met with muted thanksgiving. As one Mogopa farmer, Abram Mabidikame, put it, 'We are happy on one side and on the other side not. The government took my trousers, now it has brought back one leg. How can I walk with just one leg?' See 'Only One Leg of My Trousers,' in *TRAC Newsletter* 23, August 1992, pp.1-4.

Mogopa was thus over; the struggle to re-establish a prosperous life on that land could now go forward. The spirits of people in Mogopa were high. There was a sense of victory and vindication. Celebrations were being planned for October, and preparations were being made to plough Hartebeeslaagte. It was a very positive atmosphere in which to reflect upon the previous ten years.

The interview began with a transition in perception from an either-or to a both-and approach to the question of the roles of God and the ancestors in the return of the Bakwena to Mogopa. Before I had asked the first question, Jacob Pooe and Lucas Kgatitsoe were already discussing in Setswana the issue of the respective roles of *Modimo* and the *badimo* in a way which could easily have led us down the oppositional path of mutual exclusion. As it turned out, the awkward beginning occasioned a clarification which opened the door to a remarkably revealing and inclusive session, which not only discussed but also celebrated the prayer-mediated role of God and the ancestors in the struggle for Mogopa:

**Jacob Pooe:** We pray to God (*Modimo*) and God is the one who helped us come back. The whites removed us forcibly. We did not like it. We resisted it. And God heard our prayers. That's why we were successful in the end. Because God was on our side, to return to the land.

**Lucas Kgatitsoe:** He (Moruti Thabo) wants to know about God and the ancestors. Who was responsible for helping us. Was it God or the ancestors?

**Q:** It may not be an either-or question. Perhaps both were responsible. I am asking in a general way, open to whatever answer you may have.<sup>38</sup>

At this point Ephraim Pooe, the oldest member of the vanguard and held to be a prophet among them, began his narration of the removal, the resistance and the return. At ninety years of age, and blind now in both eyes, he is taken to see beyond that which others are able to see. Ephraim Pooe's status and role as prophet is itself inter-traditional. Much of his discourse concerns communication with the ancestors (e.g. 'As I was praying the ancestors said to me...'), and it is the ancestors who call him as prophet. At the same time he is called by the ancestors to be the spiritual leader of the whole community, including Christians. He is to be the head of the clergy of all churches, even though he is not a member of any of 'these denominations'. Significantly, he is a member of one of the indigenous churches in the Apostolic tradition. His prayers, as we will see, involve both the ancestors and the Triune God, and employ both African traditional and biblical names and images for God. As a prophet Ephraim Pooe is both an African seer (*molebi*) and a voice which tells forth the truth of the Lord in the biblical tradition (*moprofeta*). Prayer plays a major role in his communication with

<sup>38</sup> See Mogopa Vanguard Interview, op cit., p.1.

both ancestors and God. His narration is one of compelling dignity, witnessing from his first sentence ('The ancestors are the owners of this land') to his last to the multivalent integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution, told by someone for whom ancestral hermeneutics has been a way of reading people and events all his life:

**Ephraim Poee:** The ancestors are the owners of this land. Now, I was told by the ancestors to get the names of all of the elders and preachers of the different churches situated at Mogopa. The ancestors instructed me that I was the head of all of these denominations. This word from them surprised me of course! I wondered how I could be the head of all these denominations when I was not a member of any of them! I was a member of one of the indigenous churches: Ma Apostola.

So I was asked by the ancestors to get all the names of the preachers, and I did as I was asked. When I had obtained all their names, I was told that I was now the one above all others (*mookamedi*: supervisor, president) in all of these churches. I was surprised! How could I be the supervisor when I was not even a member of any of them? 'All right,' I said, 'I agree.' They said to me, 'As supervisor of all of these preachers, we are sending you now to the mountains to pray for your land.'

Now, at that stage we were still at Mogopa, we had not yet been removed. I did not even know that we were going to be forcibly removed. I went to the mountains.

**Lucas Kgatitsoe:** Before you were removed, father?

**Ephraim Poee:** Yes father, before. There is a little hill over there (indicates direction with his hand) where I looked for a place where I could kneel down and pray. As I was praying, the ancestors said to me, 'Listen now. Right here we want you to make a roadway where the ten virgins are going to walk. Right here.' I prayed, and then I went home. The next morning I took a hammer and a crowbar to remove the stones, to make a way for the ten virgins to walk on. I battled until I made the roadway, according to the instructions of the ancestors. I did make that roadway. It is there even until today. That I did according to their instructions. And I continued praying as instructed. Until even we were forcibly moved away. I continued after the removal to pray that we must be given our land back.<sup>39</sup>

Ephraim Poee's discourse is reminiscent of the patriarchal narratives of Genesis, and are theological in a similar way, in that the events described are remembered, as they were experienced, through the eyes of faith. As such, it is a narration which tests our capacity to see, or be enabled to see, with the eyes of the other. The aptness of this metaphor, often used, should not be allowed to disguise its audacity: the eyes of the other may not be assumed. Who the 'ten virgins' may be, for example, is open to question, the only biblical allusion being the ten virgins of Matthew's gospel, with whom there is no obvious connection in Ephraim's narrative. There is no mistaking the significance of the making of the road however: it was part of the preparation for the return of the Bakwena to Mogopa, ordered by the ancestors, 'the owners of this land,' *before* the removal. That it is the ancestors who call him, and that they call him to go to the mountains 'to pray for (his) land,' is wholly in keeping with the

<sup>39</sup> Ephraim Poee, *ibid.*, pp.2-3.



community of land, ancestors and current generations which is at the heart of *ubuntu-botho* - the relational spirituality of life. Ephraim then continued his narration as follows:

When we were removed we went to Pachsdraai first, where my young son began to erect a shack for me. This was before we went to Bethanie. While he was in the process of building the shack for me at Pachsdraai, he got a message informing him to tell me that when I got to Pachsdraai I was going to be loaded up and transported to Bethanie. He wanted me to come in a hurry to Pachsdraai, because there was going to be a transport to take me and a certain lady to Bethanie. This thing happened when I was still at Mogopa. My son left ahead of me to build the shack for me at Pachsdraai.

When I arrived at Pachsdraai I was informed by the ancestors to leave Pachsdraai in a hurry. I was not to remain in Pachsdraai at all, but go directly to Bethanie (home of the Paramount Chief of the Bakwena). We were taking this thing (clap), that thing (clap), this thing (clap), loading for Bethanie.

[He is clapping his hands as he says this, to emphasise the need to leave very quickly.]

When we were two months in Bethanie, Chief Lerothodi instructed that there must be a celebration. He instructed that there must be two bulls slaughtered on the occasion of accepting the Bakwena ba Mogopa into the Bethanie community. Because he said, 'These people are bulls! They can fight!'

All right. The celebration then took place. The Mogopa people, those residing in Johannesburg included, were present at the celebration. Then, the son of a certain Pete More, Montoadi by name, who was also from Johannesburg, went to his father and told him that there was an old man, long dead, who is the father of his grandmother. He did not know that old man, but had been told in a dream by the grandmother, also long dead, to go to Ephraim Pooe. The lady who spoke to the young man in the dream told him that the old man that he saw in the dream was the father of Pete More, the grandfather of Montoadi. The old man said, 'If it was not because of Ephraim Pooe's prayers, then all of the people would have died at Pachsdraai. If they had not gone to Bethanie, they would have died.' I said to the young man, 'I have heard the message and I accept the message.' When I arrived at Bethanie I was given a place where I could pray in secret, without any hindrance. Therefore I had to go to that place to thank the ancestors for that revelation.<sup>40</sup>

It seems that the ancestors were sending a message through the dream to the young man, Montoadi, to say that it was Ephraim's prayers that saved the people from death in Pachsdraai, where those who had left Mogopa 'voluntarily' in 1983 with the discredited chief, Jacob More, were already resettled. No doubt there is a degree of self-praise in Ephraim's words, though Daniel Molefe later confirmed and celebrated Ephraim's role as spiritual leader of the resistance and return. Ephraim continues, foregrounding the importance of prayer as a powerful medium of communication and wisdom, through which was revealed the 'key to enter the land':

Truly, I went to that place to thank them. To pray. In my mind I was going to ask the ancestors, 'When are we going to be able to go back to Mogopa?' But the answer was that I must continue praying. 'You keep praying! Keep praying! Pray only!' they said.

That was the time when we had to move to Onderstepoort. Thereafter we came back to Mogopa, from Onderstepoort.

<sup>40</sup> Ephraim Pooe, *ibid.*, pp.3-4.

At that time, at Onderstepoort, we had a prayer meeting, a large prayer meeting. We asked God to give us the key to the land, the key to re-occupy the land at Mogopa. We prayed, '*We ask for the key to enter.*' It was then that we decided to ask for permission to tend the graves of our ancestors as a way to re-occupy the land. Now, because we were given the wisdom, the cleverness, to ask for *the letter of permission to enter Mogopa to tend to the graves* - that's how we were able to re-occupy the land. We applied for the letter and got the letter.

But you (Daniel Molefe) are the one who got the letter, you know about it.<sup>41</sup>

At this point Daniel Molefe, assisted by Lucas Kgatitsoe, takes up the narration, elaborating on the theological themes introduced by Ephraim Poee. In particular, the relationships between and among *batho*, *badimo*, and *Modimo*, forged through prayer, and the relation between prayer and praxis in the return of the Bakwena to Mogopa, receive detailed attention. Further, the theme of shrewdness is highlighted here, and, coupled with the theological emphasis on divine direction, can be read as a dramatic instance of the prophetic pragmatism discussed in the preceding chapter:

**Daniel Molefe:** That letter gave us all the power and the strength! We then were shocked to realise that that letter had in fact been written years earlier by the Department! These whites had hidden it! That was the Department, so-called, of Co-operation and Development Aid.

**Lucas Kgatitsoe:** I negotiated with the Deputy Minister, I think it was, in 1985 for permission to tend the graves. He granted it, but just then he lost his seat in Parliament in a by-election. So, after he lost the by-election he was out. The letter was in his files, but was not sent to us. The new man came in and I don't think he even read that permission. It just sat in his files until the Director found it and was honest enough to produce it and show it to the Mogopa people and say, 'This is your letter of permission.' He handed it over to Daniel Molefe, who held it on behalf of the vanguard of the returnees.<sup>42</sup>

**Daniel Molefe:** We read the letter and realised that this letter was written in 1985! The letter said very clearly that the government was giving the people of Mogopa permission to reconstruct their village. It was not talking only about permission to tend to graves; it said, '*to reconstruct their village*' [spoken this second time slowly and sharply]. So having received that letter, we decided to return to Mogopa from Onderstepoort, being six in number, to begin reconstruction.

A few days following our return, the Boers came and asked us why we were building shacks in this area. Then I produced the letter and gave it to the Boers to read. They closed the windows of their vehicle as they read the letter. I objected, saying the letter was not theirs, they could only read it, not leave with it. They said they were just reading it. But I could see they were copying the contents of the letter. Then they went away.

After two days the police came and camped at the entrance to Mogopa. We were told, ordered, not to build any more shacks. So we agreed we would not build any more shacks. But the letter from the government to us specifically stated that everyone must

<sup>41</sup> Ephraim Poee, *ibid.*, p.4 (italics mine). Poee's question to the ancestors, 'When are we going to be able to go back to Mogopa?' recalls the sense of frustration and expectation that marked the question of the disciples to the risen Christ, 'Lord, is it now that you will restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6)' It is with a wry grin that one realises that Poee receives much the same answer as did the disciples: it is not for you to know the times and seasons which the Father has set, but you will be empowered spiritually - so keep praying, don't stop praying!

<sup>42</sup> This was but one incident in a long series of government attempts, bureaucratic, legal and physical, to block the Bakwena from returning to Mogopa (cf. *Mogopa: And Now We Have No Land*, TRAC, 1987).

clean his or her own graves. Now, our people were scattered all over: Johannesburg, Soweto, and in many other towns where they worked. According to the letter, all of the people of Mogopa could return to clean the graves. So we made it clear to the police that we would not be able to handle such an influx of people, especially during the week-ends. For that reason it was imperative for us to build more shacks, so that all of the week-enders could have a place to stay while cleaning the graves. On Sunday, they would then return to their places of work.

Then we were told that the authorities wanted to make a road straight from the main road to the grave site in Mogopa, and that shacks must be built next to the graves. We refused to agree to that. Our spokesman, Matthews Kgatitsoe, told the authorities, 'No! No ways! Nix! Because this land is ours.' So that was the end of that. From then onwards they started worrying us, harassing us and giving us sleepless nights, trying to pressurise us to leave. Then they began loading tanks onto police vehicles. There was a continuous rumbling. Kgo-kgo-kgo-kgo-kgo-kgo. Then we stopped building additional shacks.

We went five times to Pretoria, attending court cases levelled against us. Against our staying at Mogopa. As if we were now trespassers, and no longer the owners of the land. We were treated as trespassers, even though the Appeal Court in Bloemfontein had upheld our claim to the land in 1985!<sup>43</sup>

We went five times to Pretoria, and won all five times. On the sixth occasion we went to Bloemfontein. This was the second time for Bloemfontein. The judges in the Appellate Division asked the police if they wanted the judges themselves to go in person to Mogopa to give it back to the people. These were the same judges as in 1985. It was as if the judges had no authority in the eyes of the police who, under the state of emergency, were acting as a law unto themselves. As if the police were above the laws the judges were using.

Following this second appearance in Bloemfontein it was agreed that our lawyers and the government lawyers should sit down together with the Mogopa community to resolve the issue once and for all. At this point we refused to go yet again to Pretoria for the meeting, stating that the Minister of Development Aid [now Piet Marais] must now come to Mogopa to see for himself the damage caused by the government. It was thought that such an exposure might change his mind. We then went to our lawyers and emphasised that although we had been told several times in the courts that the land belonged to us, we had still not been given the land back by the government. We told our lawyers that if we were not given our land back we would take it by force, or by any other means we could devise to take it back. The lawyers asked us not to do that. They said they would now take up the case with the government. They were as good as their word. They really did take up our case, for we now have our land back.<sup>44</sup>

The struggle for Mogopa is hereby revealed to have been waged at least three levels simultaneously. First, at a legal level the community's lawyers contested the Bakwena claim to Mogopa in the courts, exposing and exploiting in the process a fortuitous oppositionality

<sup>43</sup> In 1985 the Mogopa community proceeded with a case in the Appellate Division, the highest court in South Africa, challenging the procedure followed in their removal. They won the case in September, 1985. The government had attempted to block the case by introducing a Bill in Parliament in May of that year, designed specifically to stop the Mogopa case from proceeding. Local and international pressure was brought to bear on the government, and the Bill never became law. Nothing dissuaded, the government then took another tack. While the people of Mogopa were celebrating their legal victory, and planning to return immediately to their land, the government expropriated their farms. The people of Mogopa would thus be accused of trespass if they returned. They received no notice of the expropriation and no compensation. They were told that the Pachsdraai resettlement area was their 'compensation', and that this had been given to the 'headman', Jacob More, on their behalf - this in full knowledge of the fact that the Mogopa people had deposed More for corruption four years earlier (cf. *Mogopa: And Now We Have No Land*, TRAC, 1987, p.7).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Molefe, Mogopa Vanguard Interview, op cit., pp.4-7.



between the courts on the one hand, and the government and police on the other under apartheid. Second, the community retained the option of re-occupying their land outright, keeping their struggle in their own hands. The letter of permission, admittedly a government-sourced instrument allowing the Bakwena to return to Mogopa to clean the graves and to 'reconstruct the village,' was employed to great effect in this strategy, both with the police and with local Boers. That government officials had 'buried' the letter of permission for three years in their files becomes a weapon in the community's struggle. Overcoming their disdain for 'the Department', they focus on the re-surfaced letter's strategic significance. The explicit linkage made between the discovery of the letter of permission and the prayers of the community for 'the key to enter the land' introduces a third level at which the struggle for Mogopa was waged: that of the community's *borapedi*. For Daniel Molefe, the *borapedi*, relational and inter-traditional, of the community was an inherent and necessary aspect of the return of the Bakwena to Mogopa:

**Daniel Molefe:** Now concerning the words of the old man [Ephraim Pooe] about God and the ancestors - In this village it is not just the two of us who are inclined to believe in God and the ancestors. They are many. Most in fact. As I pray to God I don't leave out my great-great-great-grandfather. I continue to pray to him. In the graveyard itself, to my great-grandfather, the father of my grandmother. His grave is here in Mogopa. I wake up at four o'clock and take my kerrie. When I arrive at the graveyard, I lay my head down in front of the grave. I will call upon God and my great grandfather. Upon God and my great-grandfather. By name. Whatever I ask for, I get it. I believe that this is our African traditional belief. It is true. Because people from Pachsdraai regularly come all the way to graveyard in Mogopa to pray their ancestors. Even this Sunday they will come from Pachsdraai to unveil some gravestones. Even so, they are still going to pray and ask their ancestors for help and so on. Any problem. They always get what they ask for.

**Q:** In your experience, then, prayer was a large part of your victory. Had you refused to pray, you would not have got the land back?

**Daniel Molefe:** Yes. It was because we prayed and the ancestors answered our prayers. If we had refused to pray, we wouldn't have got the land back.

**Q:** When you pray to God and the ancestors, what words do you say? How do you pray?

**Daniel Molefe:** 'God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit.' The Trinity. 'My ancestor, Ntate Moholo, RaMoloko. I am crying to God and to you and the other ancestors, that what I am crying about should be answered. Because you know the whole truth'.<sup>45</sup>

Listening to Daniel Molefe's discourse on God and the ancestors one gets the distinct sense that the inter-traditionality of his *borapedi* is an aspect of its relationality, such that its inter-traditionality is to be seen in the context of the inclusive relationality of his worldview. Should this sense be valid, we may speak of the inter-traditional relationality of the *borapedi* of Daniel Molefe, and of the many others in Mogopa, 'most in fact,' who share his and Ephraim Pooe's 'inclination to believe in God and the ancestors.' Molefe leads us into the Mogopa

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Molefe, *ibid.*, p.7.



graveyard to the grave of the father of his grandmother and testifies, in words that he immediately repeats, 'I call upon God and my great-grandfather.' The both/and inclusivity of his *borapedi* is an intimately personal experience. Early in the morning Molefe visits him, laying his head down on the grave and calling on the father of his grandmother by name. Further, connected to the inter-traditional and intimate relationality of his *borapedi* is Molefe's belief in the efficacy of his prayers: 'whatever I ask for, I get.' He supports his belief in the practical value of his prayer life with God and his ancestors with reference to the many others who share his 'traditional African belief,' coming from the resettlement area in Pachsdraai to the graveyard in Mogopa to 'pray their ancestors.' While his assertion that they 'always' get what they ask for raises an eyebrow, his primary ground for making the claim is that of the land restoration itself. That the Bakwena have returned to their land at Mogopa is exhibit A in his case for the efficacy of prayer in the life of the community: 'It was because we prayed and the ancestors answered our prayers. If we had refused to pray we wouldn't have got the land back.'

Having fore-grounded the role of the ancestors, Molefe then reveals a strong belief in the Triune God, whom he names as such, lending some clarity to the identity of the God (*Modimo*) to whom he relates in prayer: "'God the Father' (*Modimo Ntate*), God the Son (*Mora*), and the Holy Spirit (*Moea o Halalelang*).'" The Trinity.' Offering an invaluable window on his soul, he lets us overhear him in conversation with his ancestor: 'My ancestor, *Ntate Moholo* (Grandfather), *Ra Moloko* (Father of the Clan). I am crying to God (*Modimo*) and to you and the other ancestors...' Both intimacy and inter-traditional relationality are evident in the salutation of his prayer, and leave little doubt concerning the significance of his prayer life for his being in general. Concerning the practical dimension of prayer, his cries should be answered because his requests are grounded in the 'whole truth,' as God and the ancestors know full well. In sum, the *borapedi* of Daniel Molefe, as expressed in his prayer life, enables us to consider in the life of an individual something of the way in which the religio-cultural and the socio-economic and political is conjoined in local struggles for ancestral land, and to appreciate the affective nature of the multivalent integrality evident in the *borapedi* of community members. In the words of Harold Carter, writing from an African-American context, 'Black men and women used the spiritual force of prayer to carve avenues of liberation for themselves and their fellow citizens' (Carter 1976: 100).

Joseph Kgatitsoe then took up the narration, telling the story of the prayer vigil held at Mogopa at the end of 1983, two months before the eventual forced removal of those Bakwena who had refused to be part of the 'voluntary removal' associated with Jacob More, the

discredited chief. Kgatitsoe's affirmation, 'we never stopped praying,' runs like a refrain throughout his narration, from removal through exile to return:

**Joseph Kgatitsoe:** I have been listening and I hear that the topic you are raising concerns our belief in God and in the ancestors, and whether it was by prayers and belief in God and the ancestors that we got our land back. I wish to add the following:

In 1982 when the conflict started it was difficult. We were often going to court in Ventersdorp. There were many cases lodged against us, but each time we won the case. We were accused of refusing to accept the government proposal to leave Mogopa. Accused by the government and by Jacob More's group, who had agreed to the government plan. We had to explain why we refused to leave Mogopa. All the time the Magistrate in Ventersdorp, Mr de Villiers, sided with Jacob More's group - because they had agreed to move to Pachsdraai.<sup>46</sup>

At that time there were ongoing church services held by ministers coming into Mogopa to their congregations. In the services the congregations prayed that Mogopa should not be removed. We asked God that this terrible thing must not happen to our village. Dr Kistner came several times from the SACC to hold meetings and services in Mogopa, and on one occasion Bishop Tutu came to hold a service and night vigil, praying for Mogopa's reprieve. That was just before D Day.

In that year, 1983, Jacob More's group left and were moved to Pachsdraai. We stayed in Mogopa. In November or December of 1983, Tutu, Boesak and the others came to Mogopa and held an all-night vigil, praying for the reprieve of Mogopa. That very night there were also ministers from Lesotho and Durban.

From that time we have never stopped praying. Even at the time of the forced removal we never stopped praying. We went from Mogopa to Pachsdraai, to Bethanie, to Onderstepoort, as the others have said, but we never stopped praying. Even though we had been removed on February 14, 1984, we kept on praying through that very painful experience.

We were removed to Pachsdraai on February 14th, 1984.<sup>47</sup>

Joseph Kgatitsoe's 'addition' points to the community's persistence in prayer and its relation to their endurance in exile: from Mogopa to Pachsdraai to Bethanie to Onderstepoort the community 'never stopped praying.' Displaying a tenacious faith, the Bakwena did not lose hope or give up on their struggle to return to Mogopa. Further, his narration highlights shared prayer as a medium of solidarity between and among church leaders from the South African Council of Churches, Lesotho and the community. The prayer vigil to which Joseph Kgatitsoe

<sup>46</sup> From Lucas Kgatitsoe, following the interview, came the following background on the Jacob More story: Jacob More went to Ventersdorp to seek help from the Commissioner and the Magistrate because he was corrupt and was facing a challenge from the Mogopa community. The people were calling for a financial accounting of the moneys they had paid to him as chief, with respect to schools and other community projects. He was unable or unwilling to provide them with such a financial report. Approximately 70% of those resident in Mogopa, together with all those residing in urban areas for reasons of employment (e.g. Soweto), then called for him to resign as headman of Mogopa. So it was that he was seeking help from the government, who seized the opportunity to exploit the division in the community to remove the 'black spot' of Mogopa.

<sup>47</sup> Joseph Kgatitsoe, Mogopa Vanguard Interview, op cit., pp.7-8.

refers was observed in Mogopa in December 1983, and became part of the common narrative of resistance and faith throughout the Transvaal in the 1980s.<sup>48</sup>

That the prayer vigil had a marked effect on Archbishop Tutu became evident in subsequent years, notably in his response ('We forgive you') to the confession of Professor Willie Jonker at the Rustenburg Conference in 1990. Professor Jonker had confessed on behalf of himself, his church (NGK) and his people their 'sin and guilt' for the 'political, social, economic and structural wrongs that have been done to many of you and from which you and our whole country are still suffering.' Tutu, who had been moved deeply by the confession, and who felt constrained by the Holy Spirit to forgive where confession had been made, had proclaimed, 'We forgive you.' Though he was careful to say that neither Jonker's confession nor his response to it had been 'cheaply made,' he had subsequently been pressed to clarify his response. Acknowledging that he could not forgive on behalf of others, he elaborated on his own response with reference to his experience of the prayer vigil in Mogopa:

I was part of a South African Council of Churches delegation when we went to Mogopa, a village which was being demolished and the people were going to be uprooted. The Church leaders went to Mogopa to pray with the people before their removal. As we prayed in the rain at about midnight, one of the old men in the village whose home was about to be demolished, whose schools had already been demolished, whose churches and clinics had been demolished, stood up and prayed a prayer that I will never understand. The man said, 'Thank you God for loving us.' I have never understood that prayer (Tutu 1994: 217).

It was not until after the April 1994 elections, and the prior return of the Bakwena to Mogopa, that Tutu was able to write that he had begun to understand this prayer. Writing five years after the Rustenburg Conference, and twelve years after the vigil itself, Tutu records his memory of the event in his *African Prayerbook*, under the heading 'Mogopa':

Mogopa, a village to the west of Johannesburg, was to be demolished and its inhabitants forcibly removed at gunpoint to a 'homeland' in apartheid's forced population removal schemes. On the eve of their departure, a vigil with Church leaders from all over South Africa was held in Mogopa. The village clinics, shops, schools and churches had already been demolished. At about midnight an elder of the doomed village got up to pray and he prayed a strange prayer that I will never forget. He said, 'God, thank-you for loving us so much.'

Several years later, apartheid is dead and the people of Mogopa have

<sup>48</sup> A photograph of the vigil appears in *South Africa The Cordoned Heart: Essays by Twenty South African Photographers*, edited by Omar Bradsha, and prepared for the Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa, Cape Town, 1986. In his introduction to the collection, Francis Wilson invites the reader to 'look through the eyes of documentary photographers and study their work as carefully as any text.' In the photograph a group of male elders, Molefe, Kgatitsoe, Poee and More among them, stand under a tree, with Desmond Tutu, then Bishop of Johannesburg and General Secretary of the SACC, standing in the foreground on the left. The men are dressed formally in jackets and ties. Some have hats in their hands and are wearing long overcoats. One of the men in the background is wearing a Sotho blanket against the early morning cold. Tutu is wrapped in a black cowl, head bowed, eyes closed. Molefe and Kgatitsoe in particular look as if they have had no sleep at all. There are no women in the photograph.

returned to their village, which they are rebuilding. God did indeed love them very much, it seems (Tutu 1995:66).

It is indeed a 'strange prayer,' and we do well to acknowledge this and not be in a hurry to understand it before we make an attempt to feel it. With tenacious faith in a living and relational God, the Mogopa elder is thanking God for love in the midst of great adversity and suffering. He is identified by Lucas Kgatitsoe as Isaac More. His *borapedi* is revealed to be a response to the love of God, and recalls John's affirmation that 'we love God because God first loved us' (1 John 4:19). The uprooting from the land did not mean an uprooting from the love of God - a relationship which sustained the Bakwena in exile, and helped to empower them to return.

In Driefontein, during a group interview eleven years following the Mogopa vigil, Mam Beauty Mkhize, then President of the Rural Women's Movement and a community leader, also remembered the power of the prayer vigil in Mogopa. She was asking for prayer for Driefontein, especially concerning the need for financial assistance for the Driefontein Community Advice Centre. The prayer vigil in Mogopa, bringing together church leaders and community members, was taken as a model for such a relationship of solidarity, wherein *shared praxis grew out of shared prayer*:

I repeat my request. Put our request into prayer before you sleep. Let it be conveyed to the appropriate donors. In the case of Mogopa, the ministers of the SACC, Tutu included, committed themselves to go and make a prayer there. *No matter that they were removed, the prayer stood there until they returned.* Even we have that hope about our office - that it will stand up.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, as widely acclaimed throughout the TLRC communities, it was by the help of God and the ancestors, through prayer, that the Bakwena were empowered to return to Mogopa. Indeed, so much were the Bakwena in prayer at that time it became a byword and a source, perversely, of slander in the Ventersdorp district. It is Daniel Molefe who tells the story, eliciting much laughter, wonderfully liberative, ten years after the event:

On one occasion I was in town. I went into a shop where some Boers were talking amongst themselves. You know how Boers like to waste other peoples' time in the shops, and then buy something for 20 cents. They talk nonsense. Talking a lot of rubbish about black people. All their slanders. 'Man! You know the people of Mogopa,' one of the Boers said, 'every time you see them grouping up together all they do is pray!'

[At this everyone starts laughing.]

<sup>49</sup> Beauty Mkhize, Group Interview with Members of the Driefontein Community, with Special Focus on Women and Land, South-Eastern Transvaal, 25 August, 1994, unpublished, p.21 (italics mine).



This Boer did not like it! We were not talking politics but praying. So we could not be arrested! 'Every time you see them,' he said, 'every five minutes, they are just praying!'

[More laughing. Many voices at once, mimicking, 'Just praying!']

I looked at them. There they were saying, 'All the people of Mogopa know to do is to pray. There is nothing else they can do but go on praying.'

[Howls of laughter throughout.]<sup>50</sup>

It was the laughter of people who had just won their struggle to get their land back, all of it: both Swartrand (residential and grazing land) and Hartebeeslaagte (land used for cultivation). Simultaneously subversive and celebrative, their laughter remembered the suffering and attrition of forced removal and exile, while at the same time enjoying their reversal of fortunes, worked in part through prayer. Further, they enjoyed the irony of laughing at those who had laughed at them as being a people who did not know how to do anything else but pray - as if praxis and 'politics' had played no part in their struggle, and as if their prayer was not related to their praxis.

It is of significance that the themes of suffering and joy are conjoined in the *borapedi* of the Bakwena. Karl-Josef Kuschel, discussing Paul's experience of joy in tribulation (cf. 2 Cor. 7:4) in his study of laughter and theology, makes a searching linkage between a theology of joy and a theology of the cross, involving a consideration of the relation between joy and theodicy in Christian theology:

A theology of joy would be nothing but a naïve suppression of reality were it not mediated critically through a theology of suffering. And a theology of suffering is at the same time a theology of arguing with God, of protest, lamentation and complaint. The question of theodicy remains the constant tribulation for a Christian joy which may be certain of the 'new creation' in Jesus Christ ... There can be no theology of joy without a theology of the cross, but conversely there can be no theology of the cross without a theology of joy. The two theologies are not mutually exclusive, but condition each other (Kuschel 1994: 88).

*Kuschel's chiasmus, 'there can be no theology of joy without a theology of the cross, and no theology of the cross without a theology of joy,' goes to the empowering centre of the borapedi of the Bakwena ba Mogopa, and of the TLRC communities as a whole. In the prayer of Ephraim Pooe which closed the interview with the vanguard these themes are related in turn to that of Christian discipleship, wherein pain and suffering must be felt and responded to in sacrificial service of others. Pooe thus weaves compassionate solidarity, in response to an actively compassionate God, into the relational fabric of the borapedi of the community. In a*

<sup>50</sup> Daniel Molefe, op cit., p.11.

classic statement of Christian discipleship, Poee calls us all to *compassion*, we ‘must feel pain,’ and respond to God’s sacrifice for us (as ‘Lamb of God’) by sacrificing for others:

Our Father in heaven, I ask you to give me the wisdom of prayer. You, the Lamb of God, Lord of heaven and earth:

Father, here are your people whom you love. I ask you to grant them mercy and forgiveness of all sins. Teach them wisdom and truth. They must always be people of the truth. They must have one heart and be people of the truth and the light. And they must feel pain, sacrifice for others and know your own sacrifice made for us.

Here are your servants, O Lord. Our visitors. Give them wisdom and love, that they may preach love to other people as they go about.

Here we are, O Lord. We ask for strength, and we ask for your blessing on this land. In the name of Christ our Saviour, Amen.<sup>51</sup>

Russell Botman, in his doctoral thesis ‘Discipleship as Transformation? Towards a Theology of Transformation,’ identifies transformation (and not reconstruction) as the ‘new *kairos*’ and argues, with primary reference to Bonhoeffer, that it is a committed and critical practice of Christian discipleship in the form of responsible citizenship that is the central ethic of a theology of transformation in a context of transition.<sup>52</sup> Bonhoeffer’s approach to theology in terms of *who* questions (e.g. ‘Who is the responsible person today?’ and its corollary, ‘Who is Jesus Christ for us today?’) is relevant for the relational approach to theology in the TLRC communities, as discussed in chapter two. Botman explores the relation between Bonhoeffer’s metaphorical theology (1932-1937) and his transformative theology (1938-1944), finding a direct relationship between *The Cost of Discipleship* (1937) and the *Ethics* (1939). Specifically, Botman asks, ‘Can discipleship be transformation?’ and answers with a definite yes. Bonhoeffer’s ethic of responsible freedom leads Botman to view discipleship as responsible citizenship in the context of a changing South Africa. Countering Villa-Vincencio’s ‘theology of reconstruction’ (1992), which is seen to assume that changing structures is the key focus of the transition and thus addresses itself to the legislative process as an instrument of change, Botman argues that the key focus of the transition should be on changing people’s consciousness, and thus identifies transformation (in the preceptoral mode, and not the exchange or command mode) and not reconstruction as the ‘new *kairos*’. For Botman, following the language of Segundo, a theology of transformation is a theology of liberation that has taken the next contextual step.

Ephraim Poee’s emphasis on the discipleship of *compassion* (suffering with) and sacrificial service in response to the love of God in Jesus Christ is an important statement of

<sup>51</sup> Ephraim Poee, op cit., p.13.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Russell Botman, ‘Discipleship as Transformation? Towards a Theology of Transformation,’ unpublished PhD thesis, University of the Western Cape, 1994.

the relation between *borapedi* and praxis in the communities of the Back to the Land Campaign. Made following the restitution of title to the second farm, and in the context of prayer, the statement looks to the present and future task of transforming the ruins of Mogopa into a prosperous and caring community, blessed by God and the ancestors. Thus, whether we focus on the inter-traditional and intimate relationality of the *borapedi* of the Bakwena, or on the relation between their *borapedi* and praxis, the multivalent integrality of local theological experience and reflection is revealed to be a necessary and inherent aspect of their struggles for ancestral land and for the restoration of community life on that land.

### **3.4.2 The Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla): Prayer and Praxis II**

The Bakubung ba Ratheo began the return to their ancestral land at Molote in the Western Transvaal on 1 March 1994, eight weeks before the first-ever democratic elections in the history of South Africa. It was the first legal return to land in the Transvaal by a community forcibly removed from its land by the apartheid regime.<sup>53</sup> The return of the Bakubung began with a small number of families - a compromise reached with local white farmers, many of whom were supportive of the hard-line approach of the *Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging* (Afrikaner Resistance Movement), head-quartered in the nearby town of Ventersdorp. The white farmers, discounting the successful farming record of the Bakubung ba Ratheo before their removal, saw the returnees as impoverished refugees who knew little about how to work the land, and who thus, in their estimation, posed a threat to white property and livestock. Following multi-lateral negotiations involving the police, the community's lawyer (James Sutherland), and community leaders, the white farmers relented and promised safe passage to the returnees, one of their number going so far as to assist in a practical way with the pumping of water. The Bakubung, in addition to agreeing to return from Ledig in stages, acceded to the wishes of local white farmers who had been grazing their cattle on Bakubung land, granting a one-month extension of grazing privileges. On the part of local whites, both the change in law and a pragmatic sense of 'enlightened' self-interest among the less dogmatic can be seen to have been at work in their decision not to oppose the return; among the Bakubung, a sense of prophetic pragmatism, looking more to present and future relations with

<sup>53</sup> The return of the Bakubung was the first 'legal' return in that it had been officially approved by the then State President, FW De Klerk, upon the recommendation of the (Advisory) Commission on Land Allocation. The Commission had taken its time to grant the return, and continued to be under attack from other landless communities for not acting on their cases. The member communities of the TLRC had purposed to be back on their land before the elections, and the Commission was seen to be dragging its feet.

their farming neighbours than to past injustices, can be said to have marked their critical willingness to negotiate and compromise.<sup>54</sup>

The return, amid scenes of reunion and rejoicing in word, song and dance, was marked by a short ceremony involving the community and its friends and supporters, conducted in front of the cameras by the Rev Cyprian Ramosime (CPSA) under the pine trees at the site of the old Lutheran mission at Molotestad. Following the ceremony, the returnees processed to the graveyard to report their return to the ancestors and ask for their blessing. Soon afterward, shacks were being re-assembled from the materials of dismantled dwellings in Ledig, and were up before nightfall. Twelve weeks later, on 28 May, the Bakubung hosted a *mokete* in celebration of their return, by which time some 500 people had returned, and some 76 shacks had been built. The focus had shifted from the return itself to the reconstruction of Molotestad, which had been destroyed in the removal. The community, in consultation with several development agencies and research bodies, had begun to formulate a local development plan which addressed issues of water, housing, roads, schools, and agriculture, using community mapping techniques to identify and prioritise the most important development needs.<sup>55</sup> The prayers, poems, songs and speeches on the occasions of the return and the *mokete* witnessed to a deep and empowering piety, striking in its inter-traditional relationality and its linkages to the praxis of the community in its struggle for the restoration of Molote.

#### 3.4.2.1 The Return of the Bakubung: 1 March 1994

Waiting in Molote on 1 March for the trucks bringing the first of the returnees from Ledig were a large number of Bakubung then resident in urban areas, together with many of those who had been working in solidarity with their struggle to return (e.g. TRAC, SACC). The following excerpt is from an interview with three elders waiting under the trees outside the mission for the returnees:

**Q:** Of old, when did your people arrive here?

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Very long ago! (*Kgaaaaale!*) We finished paying for this land in 1894.

**Q:** 1894!

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Yes!

<sup>54</sup> See the speeches below of Rev Cyprian Ramosime and Chief Arthur Monnakgotla concerning the reasoning behind the Bakubung's decision to agree to the allow local white farmers one more month of grazing on their ancestral land at Molote. The negotiations at the local level may be seen as part of the 'negotiated revolution' dynamic of the transition at the level of national politics, wherein negotiation and compromise mark a pragmatic process necessitated by a mutual acknowledgement that the old is no longer sustainable and none of the 'players' has sufficient power to dictate the terms of the 'new' and thus needs the other(s) to make even a 'second-best' scenario workable (cf. Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *The Negotiated Revolution: Society and Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1993).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. TRAC, 'Looking Forward and Backward with the Bakubung,' *TRAC Newsletter* 28, July 1994.



**Q:** Purchased with money?

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Yes!

**Q:** And your people had already been living here before that, they had arrived earlier than that?

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Before 1894, yes.

**Q:** *Kgale*.

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** *Kgale*. We were here before, and it's been one hundred years since we purchased this land!

**Q:** This is truly the land of your ancestors.

**Petros Bokgopane:** Yes.

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Yes, our ancestors...

**Q:** And the role of God (*Modimo*) in today's return?

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** Yes, of course we believe in God. As believers we always had hoped that our land will come back to us, because God is on our side.

**Q:** And the role of the ancestors (*badimo*)?

**Alexander Monnakgotla:** The ancestors are part of that. They are inside it - the process by which God is restoring the land to us. We are like that, that is our culture. As in the case of the king (*kgosi*) you cannot approach the king directly. You need to go via an intermediary, the chief (*kgosana*: literally, small king), who will go between you and the king. In the same way we go through the ancestors to God. That's why many people think that we don't believe in God. Because of the link between the ancestors and God. But we do believe in God. And we believe that it is through our ancestors that we can have a link to God.<sup>56</sup>

Alexander Monnakgotla sounds themes that are repeated throughout the day. Molote is the home of the Bakubung *by right and by relationality* - the two being inextricably related in the ancestral claim of the community. The themes of celebration and thanksgiving to God and the ancestors are also foregrounded. The mediatorial role of the ancestors receives one of its clearest expressions in Monnakgotla's last speech: 'we believe that it is through the ancestors that we have a link with God.' The ancestors are *inside* the process 'by which God is restoring the land to us.' In illustration of his affirmation that 'we are like that, that is our culture,' Monnakgotla cites a cultural protocol: just as a member of the Bakubung needs to go through an intermediary, a headman, when wishing to communicate with the chief, so a person must go through an intermediary when wishing to communicate with *Modimo*. Approaching God through the ancestors is presented as a protocol of respect, in no way indicating that the Bakubung do not believe in God; on the contrary, it signals the respect of the Bakubung for the God whom they worship.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Interview with Alexander Monnakgotla, Petros Bokgopane and Paulos Thabe, Bakubung Elders, Molotestad, Western Transvaal, 1 March, 1994, unpublished, pp.6-8.

<sup>57</sup> Bishop Paul Makhubu corroborates the appeal to cultural protocol with respect to the Chief in African tradition: 'The custom of not approaching the king or any senior person directly creates the mental attitude with which an African would approach God. No ordinary man could talk to the king or chief face to face. This was considered to be extremely disrespectful and carried a heavy fine, or the death penalty, depending upon the circumstances. In the same way, God cannot be directly approached; someone must act as the go-between.' Makhubu is speaking here with reference to the ancestors, arguing that the tradition of ancestral mediation meant that 'Africans did not find the Christian practice of prayer to the Father through Jesus strange.' This

As the group interview with the Bakubung elders ended, the trucks carrying the first of the returnees and their building materials arrived. There were scenes of jumping and jubilation: returnees thudded into the earth from the trucks, twisted their feet into the soil, got their hands into it, scooped it up and rubbed it into their hair. Spirited greetings were exchanged before there was a move to organise people for the ceremony. Standing in front of the returnees and their supporters under the pine trees near the old Lutheran Mission were Chief Arthur Lebusa Monnakgotla and Rev Cyprian Ramosime. Rev Ramosime addressed the returnees and wider audience in English:<sup>58</sup>

We are overwhelmed by the fact that we have set foot on the soil of our ancestors! And it is our custom that after such a great occasion and the suffering through which we have gone, to say thank you to Almighty God and our ancestors. To expel all fears. We are starting a new life with new spirit, having conquered! The edifice of apartheid has been crumbled down! And today we rejoice and say 'Hallelujah!' to Almighty God. The people that you see here are Bakubung. They are a people of faith. They are religious. Faith and religion are inherent factors in our community. Like the Jews who were always looking forward to the coming of Christ, the Bakubung have been looking forward to the securing of their land, which has been done today! *Kgotso!* (Peace!)

[Clapping and shouts of 'Kgotso!']

While Rev Ramosime's assertion that 'the edifice of apartheid has been crumbled down' was widely quoted in the press, his God-talk was not. The deconstruction of apartheid is proclaimed in the context of the assertion of 'a new life with new spirit' for 'a people of faith' for whom faith and religion are 'inherent factors' in their community. Thus 'Hallelujah!' and 'Kgotso!' are shouted, and the return of the Bakubung to Molote is seen through the eyes of faith to be a messianic ('like the Jews looking forward to the coming of Christ') event: through suffering to joy and thanksgiving. The discourse of Rev Ramosime, an Anglican priest, also evidences the inter-traditional relationality already seen in the *borapedi* of the Bakwena ba Mogopa. He thanks both God and the ancestors, and employs both African traditional and biblical language throughout his speech. Moving from God and the ancestors to the current leaders of the community, he makes reference to Moses and the journey through the wilderness to the promised land. Moreover, for Rev Ramosime liberation from Ledig and the return to Molote is seen as nothing short of a resurrection of the Bakubung:

We thank Arthur, our leader. And we give thanks for George. These are our valiant men!

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did not make the ancestors 'messiahs or semi-gods,' argues Makhubu. Rather, 'The concept is that of mediators between God and the living. They (the ancestors) are *in-betweeners*' (Makhubu 1991:59-60).

<sup>58</sup> Rev Ramosime's speeches and prayers on the day of the return are recorded in my 'Bakubung Return to Ancestral Land,' Molotestad, Western Transvaal, 1 March, 1994, unpublished, pp.12-15.

These are the men who fought in the battle! They fought a good fight!<sup>59</sup> Today they have seen their Canaan, although there are many who are not with us today. Like Moses the leader of the children of Israel. After having worked so hard, after having suffered in the wilderness for so many nights and so many days, he never saw the promised land. But as for these men, who have sacrificed their life, who have been jailed! And others are underground as I'm now speaking! Today I think we've resurrected them! Wherever they are. And we have also been resurrected! We are leading a new life and a proper life.

Ramosime's theological language of liberation and resurrection, wherein the ancestors are resurrected (active voice) by their returning children, and the community as a whole has been resurrected (passive voice: God, whom Ramosime has already thanked, is the most likely subject) in the act of return, is one of the most moving and challenging statements heard in the course of the research. *Impassioned in hope and suffering, Ramosime moves beyond an anamnestic solidarity with the ancestors to their resurrection, and to the resurrection unto new life of the whole of the Bakubung.* It is a faith-statement that interprets the manifest event of land restitution as the tripartite work of God, the ancestors and the current leadership of the Bakubung, in moral and strategic partnership with friends of the community.

Turning his attention to the community in general, and its relations with its white neighbours, Ramosime engages in a teasing yet almost definitive discourse of prophetic pragmatism, wherein the Bakubung surprise their enemy with their grace, in the tradition of the sermon on the mount - in which practice the Bakubung 'are not losers' but reveal themselves to be 'a prophetic people' whom God will 'reward richly':

We have never meant to cause any confusion. Neither are we a people of conflict. We have lived with this white community for decades! Our great-great-grandfathers had been here and living a life of neighbourlihood with the farmers around here! So any suggestion to the contrary, that we have come here as a militant and fighting group, that is something from the blue! However, with the request that has been made of late, that we can only be allowed on this ground as long as we give the farmers one more month to keep their cattle here - okay fine! We are not losers! We give the other cheek! If one man smacks you on the right, you give him the left! If he asks for your shirt, you give him a trousers and a jacket! *Because we are a prophetic people!* And we know that we have got our God who's going to reward us richly! What we are doing, really, is to surprise our enemy! No enemy of yours can expect you to do good! But this time we do good to our enemies. Why? The element is that of surprise. And from that principle and that belief, we are enshrining our laws, our custom and our tradition. We shall continue in that way until doomsday!

<sup>59</sup> Later in his speech Rev Ramosime elaborated on the theme of the struggle and sacrifice of the leaders of the community at the time of the removal, including 'the dead' who died before the community could return, and who, in the inter-traditional relationality that characterises the *borapedi* of the community, are also thanked: 'George Monnakgotla has just arrived. The veteran. The valiant fighter. You can see his legs! He has suffered hardships in jail. And he is like this because of the struggle he fought for his ancestral land. And here we are celebrating today - we say thank you to God. And we also say thank you to the dead! Who were also in jail! Who died! But they are not here today. But we know where they are - they are in paradise. Thank you George' (Bakubung Return, *ibid.*, p.13).

The speech of Chief Arthur Lebusa Monnakgotla at the *Mokete* two months later included a passage that sheds some light on Rev Ramosime's interpretation of the non-confrontational strategy of the Bakubung with respect to their largely hostile white neighbours. In a word, the Bakubung had had enough of the 'spilling of blood amongst the people':

Bakubung ... I know very well that you were removed from your land by the spilling of blood. Others were taken to jail. You must understand that I fought a battle to get all these people here - those who are now living in these shacks, which now number 76. Many others of the Bakubung said they won't make the second attempt, 'because I will be put in jail again!' ... I have tried with the very few I have at my command, until I fell into the hands of the organisation called TRAC, and all the other organisations you see represented here (indicates guests). Some among this organisation (TRAC) were forcing the issue, saying that we should use force to get back our land. But we ourselves refused to re-occupy our land by force. Because we did not want to see the spilling of blood amongst the people - which is a thing you know very well already!<sup>60</sup>

Concerning the role of the church in the life of the community, Rev Ramosime addresses himself to the perennial, indeed 'mundane', objection of local white farmers that the church was mixing politics and religion by supporting the Bakubung in the return. For Ramosime, in concert with the belief of almost everyone interviewed, 'all life is inherent' - politics and religion cannot be kept in separate spheres of existence:

I was asked this morning as to what the role of the church is. The church's role has always been there from days immemorial. If we want to quote Christ. Christ was looking after the widow, he was looking after the destitute, he was looking after the hungry, he was looking after the suffering. So the concept that the church must not enter politics is - it is - it's mundane. *Because all life is inherent; you can't separate that.* So please, all we are looking for is to exist in harmony ... So we make our appeal. Go forward and spread the good news to the whole world.<sup>61</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Chief Arthur Lebusa ('Bring Back') Monnakgotla, in a speech delivered on the occasion of the *Mokete* celebrating the return of the Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla) to Molote, 28 May, 1994, unpublished transcription. Chief Monnakgotla elaborated on the subject of the oppositionality of local white farmers, and the process employed in the negotiations. His commentary is also revealing with respect to the respective roles and powers of Chief and Priest (Ramosime) in the return: 'When you came back to your land you came at a very difficult time, under difficult circumstances. There were right-wingers, ANC, IFP and 101 opposing groups. [The '101 opposing groups' is an addition by Ramosime, who was translating from Setswana into English.] Your coming here was right into the heartland of the AWB [the far-right, neo-nazi, Afrikaner Resistance Movement, led by Eugene TerreBlanche]. Some said you were going to be killed if you set foot on this land! When we got to the gate there, we had to return back. We went to Rustenburg. We spoke and had meetings in the halls in Rustenburg. On the day when we were supposed to come back from Ledig to this land of ours I got a phone call saying, 'You in particular are not going to lead anything.' The men of the right wing said that they wanted to see me at the gate, because they wanted to know who the Chief was. And I did exactly that! Now the man who is standing next to me [Ramosime] is a priest (*Moruti*). I chose him with all the other people so that he leads the exodus [the term 'exodus' is Ramosime's], to take our people back home, past that gate, and to show who the Chief was. We know very well that it is not a pleasant thing to come back to the land under such circumstances' (Bakubung *Mokete*: Speeches, Prayer and Interviews, Molotestad, Western Transvaal, 28 May, 1994, unpublished, pp.2-3).

<sup>61</sup> The appeal, through the media, was made by Rev Ramosime as follows: 'Please, may I appeal on behalf of the Bakubung community. We are just starting, and we've lost all our moneys by the forceful removal. We are left penny-less. We are from a barren land, a land of oppression where there is no self-expression. I don't have to tell you what Bophuthatswana is like, you've seen it for yourself. So I don't want to point a compass in that



The integrality of Ramosime's discourse, multivalent in its references to Christ and the hungry, the church and politics, is more explicitly Christian at this point than at any other in his speech. In a liberative reading of the mission of Christ, the church is called to follow the Christ who looked after the widow, the destitute, the hungry and the suffering (cf. Luke 4:18ff., Matthew 25: 31-46). It is Christ's own preferential option for the poor that is seen to be the foundation of the church's mission to those who suffer. The theme of active compassion, emerging from an experience of shared suffering, was again foregrounded in Ramosime's prayer which concluded the ceremony:

We are going to start now unpacking and putting up our corrugated irons, under the shadow of the Almighty. He will be with us. *A re rapelleng* (Let us pray):

**In Setswana:**

God who feels our pain with us, You, Master of all lamentations, Master of the stars and clouds, Master of heaven and earth - this afternoon you have brought us to this place. You have sent your star to take us forward. You the God of the bones of those who are sleeping and those that are in paradise. They rejoice with us this day! We are directing to you because you are the God who feels our pain, the God who answers when we speak to him.

**In English:**

Father Almighty we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice unto thee. Father our thanks are beyond human thanks, for having brought us so safely on the soil of our ancestors and our great-grandfathers. We will continue to worship you, we will continue to glorify you, because you are a wonderful God. Amen.

That God is a God of compassion, a God who suffers with us and 'feels our pain,' is the point of departure for a prayer that celebrates God's leadership of the Bakubung to their ancestral land. It is because God feels (our) pain that God answers (our) cries. The ancestors join with current generations in rejoicing and praising a 'wonderful God' who has brought the Bakubung back to the soil of their grandparents. As in the prayer of Ephraim Poee of Mogopa, the response to such divine compassion evoked in Rev Ramosime is that of Christian discipleship: 'Father Almighty we offer ourselves as a living sacrifice unto thee.' It is of significance for a sense of the inter-traditional relationality of Ramosime's *borapedi* and

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direction. As you see us again today, we are again on barren land. We appeal to local people, industry and commerce, and the international community, which I believe you represent. Please take this matter to them. Tell them next door is a brother and a sister who are lying hungry. I just spoke to the children this morning, I promised them that they are going to have an education. Because we have had them off from school! And in another week or two somebody must be handling the chalk under the chief, where we started. So give whatever support, financial, material and otherwise - we are looking forward to getting a response from you. You are the ambassadors; you have been sent here to investigate and to recommend' (Bakubung Return, op cit., pp.14-15).

theology that the ancestors are present in both the Setswana and English movements of his prayer. As we will see below, there is a more distinctive correlation of language and religious-cultural tradition displayed in his prayers at the *Mokete* in May.

As the returnees were reassembling the posts, walls, doors and roofs of their dwellings, Chief Lebusa Monnakgotla spoke of what it felt like to be back home, 'next to his ancestors again':

**Q:** Today is a great day!

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** A truly great day!

**Q:** In the history of the Bakubung.

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** In our history, yes.

**Q:** How does it feel to be home?!

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** Hey man! I don't know what I can say to tell you how I feel today. I feel I am so very happy! Because I am next to my ancestors again.

**Q:** I understand you will be going to visit them in the graveyard today.

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** We are already with them here! Because the graveyard is right here - everyone goes when he or she feels like.

**Q:** All right. The ancestors have truly played their role in the return.

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** Yes! They have played their role and no-one can stop them!

**Q:** I have been hearing that they have been interceding on your behalf with God.

**Lebusa Monnakgotla:** Yes! That's how we arrived back home here at our land.

Chief Monnakgotla foregrounds the role of the ancestors in the return, and rejoices in the immediacy of his access to them: 'We are already with them here!' The presence of ancestors not limited to their grave sites, they are present at Molote in the midst of the Bakubung community. A walk through the graveyard with Chief Monnakgotla and Rev Ramosime followed, serving as an introduction to the ancestors of the Bakubung - people whom the History of South Africa never knew, but who are remembered and engaged by their descendants in anamnestic solidarity and intimate relationality.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Beyond solidarity, or perhaps within it, the *anamnesis* has to do with the intimate relationality at work between and among current and previous generations of the Bakubung. The texts in stone witness to the tenderness of the relational ties: it is a discourse of love as well as respect. Jacobetha Molebatse, for example, is remembered as wife and mother. Beyond the thatness of these relationships, however, lies their quality: it is a 'loving memory' of 'my dear wife and our mother.' Richard Monnakgotla is remembered as 'my loving husband,' and, in a farewell that is as heart-felt as any in literature, he is sent on his way with, 'Until we meet again with the love of God/Ho Fihlela re kopana hape le lerato la Modimo.' The tender farewell to Richard Monnakgotla may be seen to be related in turn to the intimate relationality of the *borapedi* of the community: it is 'the love of God' that Richard's wife envisages as the means or medium of their reunion. References to Psalm 25 on Jacobetha Molebatse's stone, and the exhortation 'Rejoice in the Lord!' on Dorothea Monnakgotla's stone, are further indications of the linkages between the inter-personal relationality within families and the intimate and inclusive relationality of people, ancestors and God (*batho, badimo le Modimo Jehovahi*) in the *borapedi* of the Bakubung and of the TLR communities in general.

### 3.4.2.2 *The Mokete of the Bakubung: 28 May, 1994*

One month after the election and 18 days after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as President, the Bakubung celebrated and gave thanks for their return. A *mokete* is a feast day, an occasion of both joy and gravity, part party and part prayer. It is a day which both celebrates and gives focus to the community's sense of identity - in song, poetry, praise singing, story-telling, drumming, dancing, dramatic sketches, speeches formal and informal, gift-giving, reunions in twos and threes under the tree, laughter, drinking and dining. It is a day of hosting and being hosted, a sacramental day of grace, welcome and belonging. In short, it is one of the most wonderful days a person is going to have all year.

Following the formal programme in the tent erected for the *mokete*, we then marched, arms-linked, through the tall grass to the graveyard. A brass band played us through with a hymn, the chorus of which people took up as they gathered around the grave of Solomon Monnakgotla, where Moruti Ramosime and Arthur and George Monnakgotla were standing:

Ha le mpotsa tshepo ea ka,	[If you ask me about my faith,
ke tla re ke Jesu;	I will say it is Jesus;
Ke lapetse ho Mong a ka,	I long for my Master,
ha hae ke haesu.	His home is my home.]

Arthur and George Monnakgotla knelt down at the foot of the grave while Rev Ramosime remained standing, with the community gathered around them. As was the case during the ceremony in March, Rev Ramosime began his prayer in Setswana and concluded it in English. Unlike his prayer in March, the change in language also signalled a change in religio-cultural tradition, with a different primary addressee in each case.<sup>63</sup>

#### **In Setswana (addressed primarily to Ratheo, 'Our great Ancestor'):**

Ancestors of the Bakubung - those who have not forsaken us in this present world - Ratheo, Our Great Ancestor - in your compassion on us [*kutloelang bohloko*: feeling of pain with], plead for us to all the ancestors who are sleeping here today. We greatly thank you for your great feat of bringing us back to our ancestral home. May we experience new life. May our youth be granted your blessings. May our tribe prosper and move forward. Let them put their hearts into their homes.

#### **In English (addressed to the Father Almighty):**

Father Almighty we thank you for bringing us home. Almighty Father pour into our hearts thy Holy Spirit, that we may love you, love your land. Give us strength to work hard. Give us the power to regenerate and become a new people. In Christ our Lord. Amen.

We all respond with 'Amen', after which Rev Ramosime offers a benediction: '*Ha re tsamaeng ka kgotso, mahlanka a Morena* (Let us go in peace, servants of the Lord).'

<sup>63</sup> See 'Bakubung *Mokete*: Speeches, Prayers and Interviews,' op cit., pp.4-5.

Rev Ramosime addresses his prayer in Setswana to 'Our Great Ancestor' Ratheo (Monnakgotla), and to 'all the ancestors,' thanking them for bringing the Bakubung home, and praying that with their blessing the return to Molote will bring new life and prosperity. The theme of compassion is strong: the ancestors have 'not forsaken' their children 'in this present world,' and Ratheo is praised and thanked for his feeling-of-pain-with the current generations of the Bakubung who have suffered and survived removal and relocation. The theme of 'new life,' a key theme for Ramosime in both languages, is related in Setswana to the blessing of the ancestors upon the youth, a metonym for future generations and thus for the future of the Bakubung, who are called to 'put their hearts into their homes' on the land.

In English, on the other hand, Ramosime addresses his prayer to the Father Almighty, and prays with passion for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the people 'that we may love you and love your land.' He prays that the Bakubung, thus filled by the Spirit, will have the spiritual and physical strength to 'regenerate' (active voice), through *borapedi* and hard work on the land. This regeneration, prayed for from the Father, enabled by the Holy Spirit, and participated in by the Bakubung as subjects, is prayed for in the name of 'Christ our Lord' - completing the Trinitarian formula in this short but remarkably complete prayer. The grammar of the prayer with respect to regeneration and new life is instructive: while the power for regeneration is seen, and prayed for, as coming from the Father Almighty, the Bakubung are nonetheless the subjects of the verbs 'regenerate' and 'become (a new people).' *There is thus a sense of the middle deponent voice in the grammar of Rev Ramosime's prayer: the Bakubung pray to be filled (passive) by the Holy Spirit, and empowered (passive) by the Father, yet remain the subjects of their regeneration.* It is a grammar of worship and responsibility, of freedom and discipline.

The two movements of Rev Ramosime's prayer sharpen our focus with respect to the inter-traditional relationality at work in the *borapedi* of rural communities returning to their ancestral lands. That Rev Ramosime is a minister of one of the 'mainline' churches indicates that it is inaccurate and misleading to focus exclusively on the clergy and members of the indigenous churches with respect to the interaction of African, biblical and Western traditions in local piety and theologising. At the same time, the inter-traditionality of Rev Ramosime's prayer raises important questions concerning the dialectics of past and present in tradition, and of 'sedimentation' and 'innovation' in traditionality. Further, his prayer discourse raises the question of the role of language as a medium of religio-cultural tradition and inter-traditionality. It is to these questions that we now turn our attention.



Vasco Seleokane, a South African pastor working in the Pietermaritzburg area concerned with the relation between Christ and the ancestors in Black African theologies, writes of Rev Ramosime's *mokete* prayer, 'It is of great significance for the relation between Christology and ancestrology in local theologies that Rev Cyprian Ramosime, following his prayer in Setswana thanking Ratheo and the ancestors, continued immediately in English with a prayer which thanked the Almighty God and Christ our Lord for assisting the Bakubung to return to their ancestral land. For Rev Ramosime it is clear that the ancestors (*badimo*) worked in conjunction with God (*Modimo*) to bring the Bakubung home.'<sup>64</sup> Beyond the recognition of this 'conjunction', however, Rev Seleokane identifies a dynamic that he calls 'cultural camouflage' at work:

When a black person honestly seeks to express himself he speaks in terms of the ancestors. But when he comes to English, since Western theology has trained him that way, he does not pray in terms of the ancestors, but prays to God directly. You must ask: why is he not saying the same thing in English as he did in Setswana? There is a deep camouflage, a cultural camouflage, going on - because if he says the same thing in English as he did in Setswana it will be called 'unChristian'.<sup>65</sup>

If Seleokane is right about religio-cultural camouflage and the fear of censorship, the self-theologising project of the ASCA, under the direction of Archbishop Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, in which the first step in a Black African biblical hermeneutics is seen to be the need for black South Africans to 'take off the (white) mask' of Western inculturation, is of urgent necessity.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, it may be less a matter of cultural camouflage and more a matter of communication strategy for Rev Ramosime. Faced with a multi-lingual audience of Bakubung, white South Africans, international visitors and the wider audience reached via local and international media, he prayed in both Setswana and English, and shaped his prayer as a communication to both the addressees of his prayer and the listening audience. It is fitting that the first prayer on the day of the *Mokete oa Bakubung* should be in the language of the Bakubung, and addressed to Ratheo and the ancestors. That the prayer to the Father Almighty should be in English seems more a matter of the wider audience overhearing the prayer than of any notion on the part of Rev Ramosime that God's first language is English. Had the audience been different, Rev Ramosime could as easily have prayed to the Father Almighty to send the Holy Spirit in Christ's name in Setswana. Given that most of the Bakubung speak and

<sup>64</sup> Vasco Seleokane, 'Whither Black Christology in South Africa? Revisiting the Christology of Takatso Mofokeng,' unpublished paper, University of Edinburgh, 1995.

<sup>65</sup> See Interview with Vasco Seleokane, New College, Edinburgh, 2 March, 1995, unpublished, p.1.

<sup>66</sup> See 'Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng,' 27 September, 1994, unpublished, pp.17-19. See also the discussion below in chapter six.

understand English as one of their second languages, Rev Ramosime can be seen to be including those who do not speak Setswana in the English movement of his prayer, while not losing most of the Bakubung gathered around him.

Yet, even if this point can be credited there remains the question of the influence of language on the theological discourse of which it is a medium. Following Seleane's suspicion, we may still ask: would Rev Ramosime have thanked Great Ancestor Ratheo and the other ancestors in English? The way we think, theologically and otherwise, is strongly related to the language(s) in which we think: the etymological (hi)stories behind their vocabularies, their grammars, genders, and idioms both enable and place limits upon the articulative dynamics of making explicit that which is implicit in our faith experience. Further, the mutually influential dynamics of different languages upon each other in the mind of a person (or of a community) able to think and articulate in more than one language affects greatly the creative and critical aspects of theological thought, multiplying the options for theological exploration and expression. Thus, while it is possible to say that Rev Ramosime's prayer displays a 'cultural camouflage' of Tswana ancestral tradition when he uses the medium of English, it is not necessary to say so. Further, if indeed Rev Ramosime is camouflaging his ancestral tradition when praying in English, it is not clear whether he is doing so out of a fear of censorship (i.e. Seleane's anticipated 'because if he says the same thing in English as he did in Setswana it will be called "unChristian")', or as a confident choice to make the medium fit the message and its audience. The word 'Setswana' denotes both the culture and the language, and it is appropriate to pray to the ancestors of the Bakubung in Setswana. It may be less so to pray to them in English, and perhaps the ancestors themselves would be thought to be asking questions of Rev Ramosime in such a case. If there is a cloaking of ancestral tradition, or a sense of secrecy, it may be not out of fear of condemnation but out of a sense of cultural pride and respect: not 'What will these others say about my prayers in Setswana?' but, 'If these others wish to know what I am praying in Setswana, let them learn my language, and respect my tradition.'

Rev Ramosime concludes by praying over Arthur Lebusa Monnakgotla as he kneels at the grave of his forefather, Solomon Monnakgotla. Again Rev Ramosime makes a religio-cultural shift in his prayers: in Setswana he speaks of the ancestors; in English his language is biblical: 'carry your cross' and 'let no-one despise your youth' are taken from the gospels and the first epistle to Timothy.<sup>67</sup> It is a prayer of dedication and blessing, almost of inauguration,

<sup>67</sup> The text of Matthew 16:24-26 reads as follows: 'Then Jesus told his disciples, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their

offered on behalf of the Chief before God, the ancestors and the people on the occasion of the *Mokete*. That the Chief is commended to the ancestors and people for their acceptance, and that he is called to 'carry his cross' and not be despised (which appears in both Setswana and English), highlights the contingent nature of traditional leadership in the period of transition. Arthur Lebusa ('Bring Back') Monnakgotla is worthy of acceptance as Chief as much because he suffered with his people, and worked throughout the long years of exile for their return, as because he is of the lineage of Ratheo Monnakgotla:

**In Setswana:**

We dedicate Arthur into the hands of all those who sleep here, now that he has been given this chair of governing. And he himself governing should not be despised by anyone.

**In English:**

Arthur, carry your cross! Let no man despise your youth! Amen.

There are shouts of *Amandla! Awethu!* (Power! It is ours!). *Viva! Viva Lebusa!* Long live (Chief) Lebusa! Bless you! *Mayibuye iAfrika!* (Come back Africa!). The graveside ritual comes to its conclusion with George Monnakgotla, the most senior member of the Monnakgotla family, kneeling at the grave of Solomon Monnakgotla.<sup>68</sup> He addresses his ancestor Ratheo, God (*Modimo*) and Jesus Christ in an inclusive prayer, praying in Setswana throughout:

We are asking from our ancestors to plead for us to our Higher God. The children of the Bakubung are thankful to you, Father Ratheo, my grandfather. There is Lebusa, your son. Many do not know his name, where it comes from and what it means. Who is named after who? But it has been resurrected! Because Lebusa has walked before us, leading the tribe of Bakubung back to this place of Molote. We were forcefully removed, uprooted, and thrown into the wilderness of lions!<sup>69</sup> Lebusa has brought back the Bakubung!<sup>70</sup> We thank you our Chief (*Morena*) and God (*Modimo*) for bringing us back to our land. Lebusa, don't become weary because of gossiping! Because you are a dumping ground for each and every person. You will be pulled, dragged in all directions. Be of one mind and one spirit. Thank-you our God. Bless everything, from the beginning of this return up to now, in the name of Jesus

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life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it. For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (NRSV). The text of 1 Timothy 4:12 reads as follows: 'Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity' (NRSV).

<sup>68</sup> Vasco Seleane, commenting during our translation of George Monnakgotla's prayer, makes the following observation: 'Note that George kneels at the grave. This shows that he is addressing that ancestor in particular. It is specific when you kneel at one particular grave. You are getting linked specifically with that ancestor.'

<sup>69</sup> This seems to be a reference to the Pilansburg Game Reserve, which was established, amid no little controversy, on part of the land designated for the resettlement of the Bakubung in the Ledig/Sun City area.

<sup>70</sup> The name 'Lebusa' means 'bring back'; George Monnakgotla is playing on his name here, praising him: 'Lebusa (Bring Back) has brought back the Bakubung!'

Christ, who has led us to this place. Amen.

Thank-you Bakubung!<sup>71</sup>

*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* is sung at graveside,<sup>72</sup> and we begin to process back to the pine trees and the tent led by the brass band. The Monnakgotlas and Rev Ramosime remain at graveside for interviews, and to receive the greetings of Bakubung and guests alike.

George Monnakgotla's prayer moves 'from our ancestors ... to our Higher God,' in accordance with the Setswana tradition of praying through the smaller/younger ancestors (*medimo e menyane*) to the greater/older ancestors (*medimo e megolo*), and eventually, it is believed, to 'our Higher God' (*Modimo*). Included in the mediation of the prayer at its end is Jesus Christ - the Christian tradition signalled also by the biblical language of 'be of one mind and one spirit' (cf. Philippians 2:2), which is introduced with respect to the need for the community to unite behind Chief Lebusa. The inter-traditionality of George's prayer thus involves the ancestors, a 'resurrected' chieftaincy, Jesus Christ, and God (*Modimo/Jehovah*): he moves by name from Chief Ancestor Ratheo ('my grandfather'), to the current Chief, Lebusa, to *Modimo*, and concludes 'in the name of Jesus Christ.' Indicative of the inclusive relationality of George's *borapedi* is that he thanks all of the prayer's addressees for having led the Bakubung back to Molote: each in turn is identified as the one who brought back/led back the people to their land. Finally, when George thanks the Bakubung following the 'amen' he is thanking the entire community of past and present generations.<sup>73</sup> The inclusive relationality of the prayer reinforces George's call that the Bakubung 'be of one mind and one spirit.' Thus, giving thanks to the chiefs, ancestors, Christ and God for the return of the Bakubung, George looks ahead to the potential internal difficulties to be faced in the restoration of the community on the land. With the wisdom of a senior elder, he uses his prayer both to call for God's blessing upon his Chief and people and at the same time to instruct them in the crucial matters of unity and co-operation in the community.

<sup>71</sup> See Bakubung Mokete, op cit., pp.5-6.

<sup>72</sup> *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* ('God Bless Africa') has been called the 'healing song', and is an inclusively multi-lingual prayer to the Lord (*Nkosi/Morena*) to bless Africa, guard and guide her people, send the Holy Spirit, save the nation and put an end to wars and troubles. Formerly the anthem of the ANC, it is now, in conjunction with the traditional Afrikaner anthem, *Die Stem* ('The Voice'), the new national anthem of South Africa. Apart from, and prior to, party-political considerations, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* has been sung by communities like the Bakubung as part of their communal *borapedi* and praxis of struggle for land and life.

<sup>73</sup> Vasco Seleane, commenting on the way George Monnakgotla ends his prayer, notes, 'When he says "thank-you Bakubung" he is including everyone: the ancestors and the people gathered around him there at the grave. All of you who were there. This is because the ancestors are among the living. That is where they are situated, especially as you were all standing around the grave. Also, they are among the living in that the graveyard is close to the site of the village where people reside' (cf. Interview with Vasco Seleane, op cit., p.2).



### 3.5 Borapedi and Praxis: A Concluding Summary

The relation between borapedi and praxis in the land struggles of rural communities gives further definition to the multivalent integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution. Conjoining religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analyses within an 'inherent' worldview, the communities experience their relationships with God (*Modimo/Jehovah*) and their ancestors as an essential aspect of their ties to and struggles for the restoration of their land, and the subsequent re-rooting of their lives the soil. Further, the relationality of their *borapedi* is an intimate experience, the affectivity of which is prior to its effectivity. The anamnestic solidarity of current generations with their ancestors is personal, 'by name'. Moreover, beyond but by no means forgetting the *memoria passionis et mortis* of the communities, the *memoria resurrectionis* is beginning to play a more prominent role in the theological discourse of the communities as they return to their land, as articulated most clearly by the Bakubung ba Ratheo.

The inter-traditionality of the *borapedi* of the TLRC communities is to be seen in the context of the inclusive relationality which characterises their faith experiences and theological reflection. Specific linkages made between the health of the community and closeness to the ancestors; *toka*, *khotso*, *pula* and *nala* (justice, peace, rain and abundance - a grounded jpic); a theology of suffering and a theology of celebration; and the experience of the sacrificial love of a compassionate God and the ensuing call to a Christian discipleship of sacrificial service of others, indicate in some detail the importance and direction of the relation between *borapedi* and praxis in the struggles of the communities for land and life. Prophetically pragmatic gambits like launching the return to Mogopa by way of cleaning the graves of the ancestors are indicative of the linkages between spirituality and strategy. Throughout, the tenacity of faith and endurance of hope for which the communities are famous is seen to be rooted in their ongoing relationships with *Modimo/Jehovah* and their ancestors, which constitute the heart of the linkage between prayer and praxis in their struggles.

It is for this reason that Daniel Molefe's confession of the 'complacency' of the Bakwena with respect to their piety following the return to Mogopa is so serious. Many challenges remain. There is no easy path from the restitution of title to ancestral land to the restoration of a peaceful and prosperous life on the land. The ongoing struggle of the community with the land and with its neighbours, and the internal struggle of women for inclusive justice, requires that the *borapedi* which played so important a role in the reunion of land and people be sustained. The import of the findings of this research is that the downward spiral of dispossession and impoverishment will be turned around only through the

maintenance of the integrity of the relationships between and among *batho*, *badimo le Modimo/Jehovah*, as expressed in an ethic of social justice and community solidarity.

## CHAPTER 4

### The Conflict of Patriarchies in Local Struggles for Ancestral Land

'*Ke lefatse la bo'rena*. That is what we say. It is the land of our fathers. We don't want the whites to say, *Ons Vaderland*. Because that is to say it is their land and theirs alone. We want to say it is the land of us all ... We should share the land.'

Petrus Makhubedu,  
Moletete Community

One of the more revealing windows on the patriarchal nature of most ancestral hermeneutics is the way in which the land is named: among Sotho speakers, for example, it is *Lefatse la Bo 'Ntat 'a Rona* (the Land of Our Fathers); among Boers it is *Die Vaderland* (The Fatherland).<sup>1</sup> These names reveal more than the thatness of inherent patriarchy however; they speak also of a *conflict* of patriarchies in ancestral hermeneutics, to which conflict we now turn. This chapter will document the conflict of patriarchies as experienced and interpreted on the ground in the communities struggling for the return of their land. While the discussion of the conflict will of necessity move through oppositional territory, including a consideration of false fathers, suspect historiography, corrupting co-optation, assumed 'trust' and its relation to hunger, and white exclusivity in contrast to black inclusivity, the aim of this section is to document the stated desire of rural communities to move beyond the conflict of patriarchies as they return to their land. Throughout the communities there is a commitment to sharing the land with all who live on it and work it,<sup>2</sup> marked by a critical willingness to view white farmers not as enemies but as neighbours and potential co-operants, should they be able to accept and participate in an inclusive vision of the new South Africa. The theme of prophetic pragmatism

<sup>1</sup> While the Sotho (*Lefatse la Bo 'Ntat 'a Rona*), Tswana (*Lefatse la BoRra Rona*), Afrikaans (*Die Vaderland*) and English (the Land of Our Fathers) languages will be foregrounded in the discussion, Nguni languages (e.g. Xhosa and Zulu: *Umhlaba wabo Baba Bethu*, and *Izwe labo Bawo Wethu*) are by no means excluded. The discussion seeks to be indicative and not exhaustive.

<sup>2</sup> The reference is to the *Freedom Charter*, adopted by a 'Congress of the People' in June 1955 in Kliptown, Soweto. The clauses in the *Freedom Charter* concerning the land have been controversial from the outset: white land owners found them treasonous, fearing that their landed property would be confiscated; and Pan-Africanists found them too moderate, some going so far as to say that willingness to share the land with non-Africans amounted to the selling of the African birthright. The clauses state: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it,' and, 'The land shall be shared among those who work it.' See the discussion in Govan Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa - A Short History*, Cape Town, 1992, pp.75-77, 82-83.

is again apparent in the approach of the communities, the quality of both their grace and their socio-economic analysis being subversive of the old and enabling of the new: their grace is subversive of the divisive legacy of apartheid on the land and enabling for the realisation of their inclusive vision of sharing the land; and their socio-economic analysis is subversive of the impoverishing legacy of apartheid on the land, reversing the downward spiral of dispossession and poverty towards a shared prosperity. At the same time, an internal conflict of patriarchies between those chiefs, headmen and male heads of households who resisted the forced removal and relocation of their people and those who allowed themselves to be co-opted by the apartheid regime and so became complicit in the forced removals of their people presents a significant challenge to communities as they return to their ancestral land.

#### **4.1 The Conflict of Patriarchies in Ancestral Hermeneutics**

The conflict of patriarchies will be discussed in two sections. The first documents a grounded discourse of *Lefatse la Bo'Ntat'a Rona* (The Land of Our Fathers), drawing on interviews and hearings with the Moletele, Mashilane, and Dingleydale communities of Mpumalanga and Northern Province, and the reflections of Harry Makubire of Alexandra and Archbishop Ngada and Rev Mofokeng of ASCA. The second section explores the painful subject of false fathers, European and African.

##### **4.1.1 Lefatse la Bo'Ntat'a Rona: The Land of Our Fathers**

The graves of the ancestors, as discussed above, are of historical-legal and religio-cultural significance for the conflict of patriarchies in ancestral land struggles: read from below the graves witness to the claim that African fathers have a primary right to the land over white fathers. There is a great deal that is patriarchal about rival ancestral claims on all sides, and a critique of patriarchy, black and white, from an African womanist point of view will be presented in chapter seven. At this point we may note that while both the foremothers and forefathers are named and remembered in the graveyards and communities, the context and language in which the question of ancestral claims is debated, whether African or European, is patriarchal and androcentric.

Indicative of the conflicts of patriarchies is the striking confrontation associated with the events of June 25, 1993, when both the Back to the Land Campaign and the right-wing Afrikaner Weerstandsbeweging (AWB) took their cases to the multi-party negotiators at the World Trade Centre. As discussed above, rural land-less communities presented their demands in a *Memorandum* which was part of a peaceful demonstration; the AWB in contrast crashed



violently through the plate-glass frontage of the Centre and into the foyer, demanding an independent Afrikaner *volkstaat* with a wild display of arms.<sup>3</sup> The Afrikaans terms *Die Vaderland* and *ons volkstaat* are spoken of as being deeply insulting within rural land-less communities, and are summarily rejected as acceptable names for the land, even when the speakers, often later in the same speeches, indicate their critical willingness to share the land with local white farmers. It must be remembered at all times, however, that inclusivity of vision is not at the expense of a hermeneutics of suspicion with respect to the ongoing influence of the past on the present, and contains an inherent demand for land restitution.

We begin our consideration of the conflict between the land as *Lefatse la Bo 'Ntat 'a Rona* and as *Die Vaderland* with a presentation of the discourse of communities in the Eastern Transvaal, who, in the run-up to the elections of April, 1994, were facing the proximate threat represented by right-wing Boers who rejected the compromises being made by FW De Klerk in the negotiation process, and were mobilising to defend *Die Vaderland* and establish a *volkstaat*.<sup>4</sup> The Moletete were characteristically incisive as they responded to the *volkstaat* rhetoric of the *Boerevolk*<sup>5</sup> in the Lydenburg area:

**Q:** On the way here we went through Lydenburg and saw signs everywhere saying: *Hierdie is Ons Volkstaat*. It was painted on the road in white paint. It was stuck on traffic signs in the town and on the highway. The same in Ohrigstad. It was even written on the official sign welcoming people to Lydenburg. They are definitely mobilising.

**Barnas Mashego:** It's what we have been saying. And they are violent.

**Q:** How do you respond to the claim of the Boers that South Africa is *Die Vaderland*?

**Barnas Mashego:** That is an insult to us!

**Petrus Makhubedu:** Yes!

**Barnas Mashego:** That is really an insult to us! Because our forefathers were originally from here. There is nowhere else we were coming from. They found us here. And then all of a sudden they 'own' the land on which we were residing! So, when they call themselves this '*Vaderland*' it is an insult to us.

**Bright Mashego:** See, they should be more specific, what they mean when they say, 'Fatherland'. Because if maybe they say 'Fatherland' because they were born here, they are right! But it is their 'Fatherland' jointly with us! We are one thing together. They shouldn't

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion above in chapter two under the heading, 'The Graves of the Ancestors as a *Locus Theologicus*.'

<sup>4</sup> See the discussion in Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution*, Sandton, 1994, pp.200-205. A lack of consensus among the different right-wing Boere bodies (e.g. the Volksfront, the Volksunie) concerning where the *Volkstaat* should be led to conflicting submissions to the Commission on Boundaries of CODESA. Since the Boerevolk are scattered throughout the country, and they did not constitute a majority in any one region which could be demarcated as a *Volkstaat*, competing submissions on boundaries weakened their case. The failed military raid into Bophuthatswana by the Volksfront army in March 1994, ostensibly to come to the aid of Lucas Mangope, also greatly weakened their claim for a *Volkstaat*.

<sup>5</sup> The right-wing term *Boerevolk* is preferred to the term *Afrikaner* among most supporters of the demand for an independent *volkstaat*.

separate this 'Fatherland' as their own. As being theirs alone. We are both fatherlanders in this land.

**Q:** What really insults you is when they say it is their fatherland alone, *feela*, theirs only. Exclusive to them.

**All:** Yes.

**Petrus Makhubedu:** *Ke lefatse la bo'rena*. That is what we say. It is the land of our fathers. We don't want the whites to say, '*Ons Vaderland*'. Because that is to say it is their land and theirs alone. We want to say it is the land of us all. We want to be able to live with them. We should share the land. We don't want to chase the whites away. They know agriculture. They know economics. They know how to farm economically, so that there is plenty of food. But we don't want this '*Ons Vaderland*'.

**Barnas Mashego:** The problem is just there. They don't want to share the land. They say it must be them alone. Them only. It is this 'only' that is their big mistake. Also, a second problem is the way in which they acquired the land. For example, after the war white soldiers were given farms. They occupied farms like Fleur de Lys (the farm immediately east of Eden Farm) and Guernsey Farm. They did not have to pay for it. The black soldiers were given jackets and bicycles!

**Petrus Makhubedu:** The blacks were given jerseys and bicycles. Whites were given land!

**Barnas Mashego:** The whites were given lands which they are now claiming as their own. But we all fought together against Hitler, black and white! We helped each other in that war.<sup>6</sup>

The discourse of the Moletele witnesses to both the rural condemnation of a white exclusionary regime on the land<sup>7</sup> and a remarkable willingness to resist the impulse to assert a counter-exclusivity, insisting instead an inclusive vision of a shared land. On the one hand, Barnas Mashego's critical exclamation, 'They found us here. And then all of a sudden they "own" the land on which we were residing!' is repeated often throughout the communities, as will be seen below in the speeches of Willis Ngobe of Dingleydale and Harry Makubire of Alexandra. Likewise, the point made concerning the dispossession of black South Africans as a consequence of the granting of farms to white soldiers returning from World War II is made throughout the Eastern Transvaal. In the Mashilane Community, for example, one of the older men stated tersely, 'In 1945, after the war against the Germans was over, those who fought the war were given pensions. The white soldiers, the Boers, were given land! And we the black soldiers were given jerseys and bicycles! And the land given to the whites after that war, it was our land!'<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, the critical willingness of Bright Mashego to seeing white

<sup>6</sup> Moletele Interview, 3 February, 1994, pp.10-11. The reference to the World War II provoked a long story told by Elphas Thete, concerning how land was given to returning white soldiers and what that meant by way of dispossession and rural migrancy for scores of black farmers and farm workers.

<sup>7</sup> See discussion above in chapter two under the heading, 'The Moletele: A Critique of Paper Title'.

<sup>8</sup> Group Interview with Members of the Mashilane Land Committee, 4 February, 1994, pp.3-4. The matter was addressed by Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to South Africa in March, 1995, during which she unveiled a War Memorial in Soweto, in honour of black South African soldiers who served in the two world wars of this century. It is a memorial which looks backward to the injustice and pain of discrimination and dispossession, and forwards to the healing of that pain. As one of the first monuments to be unveiled in the new South

farmers as joint 'fatherlanders' with black farmers, inviting white farmers to move beyond their exclusivistic *Vaderland* pretensions, is an enabling sign of hope for a new South Africa, and one that is largely shared in the discourse of the TLRC communities throughout the Transvaal. The overwhelming message, as will be discussed below in the concluding sections of this chapter, is one of enabling criticism of the past and a prophetically pragmatic approach to the present and future, 'so that there is plenty of food.'

Turning to the Mashilane Community, the Mashilane Land Committee (MLC), in the course of addressing the *Vaderland/volkstaat* issue, went back beyond 1945 to 1652, asking penetrating questions of the presumed right to land associated with the arrival myth of the Boers in South Africa:

**Male Voice:** Let me address this matter. We have confidence that God is with us (*Modimo o na le rona*).<sup>9</sup> God sees and lives. Only, where we have the graveyards of our ancestors [begins thumping the table at this point], it's where God has given us, and we are still demanding that land.

**Male Voice:** Just here at this point. The Boers when they came here - they were only 100 in number. Those three ships.

**Male Voice:** And only eight women. *Can eight women stand for 100 men?*

[Starts laughing, and others join him.]

**Q:** Eight women?

**Lorraine:** *When they came, did they bring soil with them?*

**Male Voice:** Never!

**Male Voice:** They never carried soil with them to come to South Africa!

[All laugh]

**Q:** Yes (laughing). But they still say these things! When we into Lydenburg, we saw a word painted on the sign which welcomes you to Lydenburg, '*VOLKSTAAT*'! Then there were many signs on the road, stuck to traffic signs and direction markers and all over, which said, '*HIERDIE IS ONS VOLKSTAAT*'!

[Many voices: Yes, we have seen them: *Volkstaat*.]

Again, on the way out of Lydenburg we saw '*Volkstaat*' painted in white on the road itself.

[Laughter at the fact that it is painted in white.]

**Lorraine:** We reject this!

**Q:** Yes. Can you talk about it further?

[Several begin at once.]

**Male Voice** [in English]: They say God is with them. You can say that there they have failed. In the first place they can't deny what they have done. They came here and took our land. They gave us this black education and so on. Bloodshed. At this moment they are aware now that they are now coming to negotiations with us. It's now that they start to see now that black men are also human - children of God. This is their 'discovery' now. Then this is a proof that we are all believers in God. And then, what they have made there in Lydenburg is just a something like a - it's fear, because they are aware that they are now

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Africa, the critical re-reading of the history of South Africa implied in the memorial is significant for an ancestral hermeneutics of the struggles of people on the land.

<sup>9</sup> '*Modimo o na le rona*' is the Sotho translation for *Emmanuel*, 'God with us,' in the Gospel of Matthew (1:23).

going to elections with superior numbers against them. Now they are trying to disturb the elections.

Q: Yes.

**Male Voice** [in English]: That is now why they are doing that.

Q: Yes.

**Older Male Voice** [in English]: Now returning to their arrival. They came on ships. From there they used the ox. *Who was leading the ox?*

Q: Yes.

**Older Male Voice**: *Who was going in front of the ox? Is it not our forefathers?* Our forefathers did a lot for them!

Q: Yes.

**Older Male Voice**: Now today they pretend they don't know it! That our fathers didn't do it!

Q: Yes. And also they will say of their farms, which are looking very good, that they did it.

**Male Voice**: It is us!

Q: Yes, who did the work.

**Male Voice**: It is our hands. That is our hands. Everything is our hands.

Q: Yes. And yet they don't see you as farmers. They say that they are the farmers and you are the farm workers.

**Frederick**: Yes, they don't see us as farmers.

Q: And when you say, 'we are farmers' - ooh (makes body motion to indicate rejection)!

**Frederick**: Yes.

Q: Yesterday a man said, 'I am a farmer without a farm.'

**Several Voices**: Aow! It's true.<sup>10</sup>

The questions raised in the discourse of the Mashilane are pointed tools in a local demythologisation of the arrival narrative of the Boers. The first and most surprising of these, 'Can eight women stand for 100 men?!' with its attendant male laughter, is no doubt asked with a certain scurrility within the patriarchy of the mostly male Land Committee. Beyond the scurrility, however, though not the patriarchy, and leaving to one side the question of the accuracy of the numbers being quoted, the question points to the general observation that the white men who arrived with van Riebeeck mixed their blood with African women - having not brought with them, in the eyes of the Mashilane, a sufficient number of their 'own' women. In a society in which the definition of human rights, indeed of humanity itself given the racist anthropology at work, had so much to do with the determination of an individual's race, the criteria employed in the definition of race were of great importance. The Race Classification Act (later re-spun as the Population Registration Act) was thus one of the central pillars of apartheid. To question the 'purity' of the blood, the *sine qua non* of the identity discourse of white supremacists, flowing in the veins of the Boerevolk at the end of the 20th century is thus to strike at the foundations of the impulse to superiority elaborated in the legislation and quotidian practice of apartheid. 'Can eight women stand for 100 men?!' 'If not the 'eight', who?' The implications of this line of questioning make a nonsense of the practicability of the

<sup>10</sup> Group Interview with Members of the Mashilane Land Committee, 4 February, 1994, pp.8-10 (italics mine).



Race Classification Act, exposing to ridicule the 'purist' pretensions of the supremacist anthropology of apartheid, and subverting the identity discourse of white patriarchy.<sup>11</sup>

That said, it must be acknowledged that an insidious danger lurks around the edges of such a line of questioning, that of being caught in the apartheid mindset even as one ridicules its authors. If the laughter is merely because the Boers themselves have African blood flowing in their veins, the question of why the having of African blood should be prejudicial is left unasked. The very word 'denigration', for example, witnesses to the connotative force of racism in the English language, and it would be easy to proceed with a criticism which undermined itself with an uncritical use of language. The black consciousness quest for a true humanity, and the theological assertion, made so often by Church Leaders, that we are all God's children, equal in God's eyes, with attendant dignity and human rights, would in such a scenario be left unappropriated.<sup>12</sup> In the event, subsequent questions and laughter indicate clearly that the laughter at this point, apart from any element of the scabrous in the attitude of the men, is at the expense of the Boerevolk who are at pains to deny their African blood, and not because they have it in the first place.

It is not coincidental that it is the only woman present, the MLC's secretary, who responds to my question, 'Eight women?', and that she does so by shifting the focus abruptly to her own question. Not sharing in the laughter, and deflecting the men from the painful memory of generations of coerced cohabitation,<sup>13</sup> the secretary made one of her few interventions in the interview. 'When they came,' she asks, 'did they bring soil with them?' Recognising the devastating relevance of her question, one of the men answers immediately, 'Never!' The question is taken up by everyone. To much laughter the answer comes more fully, 'They never carried soil with them when they came to South Africa!' The idea is risible. 'So, where did they get the soil?' is the question implied by the first. 'It is African soil,' is the obvious answer, 'and they took it.' It is in this very African light that the *Hierdie is Ons Volkstaat* ('Here is Our Volkstaat') campaign of the local right-wing Boers is critiqued. 'We

<sup>11</sup> Cf. 'Special Issue: Theological Anthropology in South Africa', *JTSA* 76, 1991. See in particular Simon Maimela, 'Traditional African Anthropology and Christian Theology,' pp.4-14; C. Landman, 'The Anthropology of Apartheid According to Official Sources,' pp.32-45; Gerald Pillay, 'The Anthropology of Apartheid: The Historical Search,' pp.46-56; and Buti Tlhagali, 'The Anthropology of Liberation Theology,' pp.57-63.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Steve Biko, 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,' in *I Write What I Like*, Harmondsworth, 1988 (2nd edition), pp.103-114; and Desmond Tutu, *Hope and Suffering: Sermons and Speeches*, Johannesburg, 1983; *The Rainbow People of God*, Cape Town, 1994; *An African Prayerbook*, London, 1995.

<sup>13</sup> The 'coerced cohabitation' is often described more directly as rape. As discussed in chapter seven, it is both Africa and African women who are spoken of as having been raped (cf. Maishe Maponya, 'The Hungry Earth,' in T. Hauptfleisch and I. Steadman, eds., *South African Theatre*, Pretoria, 1984, pp.150-165).

reject this!' declares Lorraine. Elaborating, one of the men moves the critique forward to the current moment, reading the *Ons Volkstaat* campaign as a reaction to expected defeat at the polls in the upcoming democratic elections. His critique is explicitly theological, 'They say God is with them. You can say that there they have failed. In the first place they can't deny what they have done. They came here and took our land.' Such a denial is a long way from the kind of confession that could enable the process of forgiveness and reconciliation to occur. Further, the recognition of the humanity of black people by local Boers is presented as one which they are being forced to make by the negotiation process, rather than one which they are making on their own in response to an acceptance of the theological assertion of a common God, the Parent of us all, in whom we all believe. The *Ons Volkstaat* language is seen to be one of fear, of a people in denial, designed to disrupt the elections.

The third question countering the *Die Vaderland* position of the Boers comes from one of the older men present, who takes us back to the arrival of van Riebeeck. 'They came on ships,' he recalls. 'From there they used the ox,' he says, moving the story onto the land. Then comes his question, 'Who was leading the ox?' At this point everyone began to smile at him, nodding their heads, saying, 'Yes father, speak!' 'Was it not our forefathers?' he asks, putting a fine point on it. 'Our fathers did a lot for them!' he declares. In words reminiscent of the stories of assistance offered by First Peoples to the first Europeans in the 'Americas,'<sup>14</sup> the Mashilane describe the ongoing insult of being denied the thanks that both they and their foreparents are owed by a people who pretend not to know.

In the Lowveld to the east, the Dingleydale Farmers Union (DFU) seeks to make the best of the punishing legacy of a 'betterment scheme', in spite of the draconian allowance of 1.3 hectares per farmer - an allocation which Willis Ngobe views with appropriate disdain. '1.3 hectares,' he says, '- it's not fit for a man to live on with his family. And you will never call yourself a farmer while farming a 1.3 hectare plot. That is a gardener! Not a farmer! According to my experience that is a garden, 1.3 hectares.'<sup>15</sup> The date of the group interview with members of the DFU was, as it happened, April 6, 1994 - the last time the national holiday known as 'Founder's Day' was observed. It commemorated the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck of the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* in Table Bay in 1652, the date on which History, as a European construct, was asserted to have begun in South Africa. The date has since been dropped from the slate of national holidays in the new South Africa, partly in

<sup>14</sup> Cf. R. Wright, *Stolen Continents: The 'New World' through Indian Eyes since 1492*, Toronto, 1992.

<sup>15</sup> Willis Ngobe Interview, 6 April, 1994, p.5.

response to the assertion of a counter-chronology from the margins of the heretofore dominant History, and partly in response to the business lobby which campaigned for the new slate of holidays to be kept to a minimum in the interests of productivity.<sup>16</sup> While waiting under the tree near the field where the meeting would occur, someone noted that the fact that it was a national holiday in South Africa might affect attendance - an idea which elicited no little derision. The discussion which ensued was marked by much laughter, highlighting the ironies which surface in communities like Dingleydale on a day like 'Founder's Day':

**Q:** Yes, they say Mr Van Riebeeck arrived today. 'Founder's Day.' But I see you are not taking a holiday yourself.

**Willis Ngobe:** No.

**Q:** So, what do you think of this 6th of April holiday.?

**Willis Ngobe:** To me it's just nothing.

[Lion Chiloane begins to laugh.]

**Willis Ngobe:** I've got nothing to do with Van Riebeeck. He's not my grandfather. He's not my ancestor.

**Q:** Yes.

**Willis Ngobe:** *He finds me here in South Africa! I'm the first man. He comes after me. So how can I just obey Van Riebeeck's? Van Riebeeck, his holiday?*

[Lion Chiloane is laughing loudly now. He is joined by others under the tree.]

**Willis Ngobe:** I can better obey Shaka's Day, because who is my ordinary grandfather?!

[This last speech by Ngobe is difficult to hear above the laughter.]

**Q:** So, when these descendants of Van Riebeeck say *Die Vaderland*, *Ons Vaderland*?

**Willis Ngobe:** It's just a stupid mind.

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes! Why do they?

**Willis Ngobe:** *It's just a stupid mind. People - they don't want to come out in the open and tell the truth you know. They try to dodge.*

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes.

**Willis Ngobe:** *They know very well that they were foreigners in this place. They cannot say this is their fathers' land. I can say this is my fathers' land. I am not from Europe! I am born here in South Africa. So, here is my fathers' land.*

**Q:** Yes.

**Willis Ngobe:** *They are foreigners. But now, today - I don't want to discriminate between myself them. They are my fellow brothers, who are just in one place with us. We must share this ground and live together! That's all!*

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes!

**Willis Ngobe:** *I can't say to them they must leave and go someplace. No no no no!*

**Lion Chiloane:** Ummh. Ummh.

**Willis Ngobe:** *I have learned many things from the whites, you know. I have been influenced in hard work and all this from the whites. So I don't hate them. But they mustn't tell themselves or tell anyone else that it's their Fatherland!*

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes.

**Q:** Yes. You say they must share the land.

**Lion Chiloane:** Yes!

**Willis Ngobe:** *Yes! Work together and live together in this area! We have learned more from whites than the white people. I cannot hesitate to say it. Many things. This farming! Proper farming! Is from the whites. We were not farming to save, to supply other countries. We were just farming to save our families in our own fields in the past, you know. But*

<sup>16</sup> See discussion in the introduction on *khronos* and *kairos* in the transition period.

whites come with the ideology of farming a lot and supplying other countries. If there is drought, still you can get mealie meals from America. That is how you can say this people has influenced us in farming.

**Q:** Yes. And as for the 6th of April?

**Willis Ngobe:** No that is nothing. I've got nothing to do about that. And it's not their fathers' land! No.<sup>17</sup>

Willis Ngobe, like the Moletele elders above, condemns the pretension to indigeneity of the Boers, ridiculing its more preposterous aspects: 'Van Riebeeck's not my ancestor!...I am not from Europe! I'm the first man. He comes after me ... They know very well that they were foreigners. They cannot say that this is their fathers' land.' Yet, the critique made, he goes on to assert a pragmatic willingness to share the land with white farmers, affirming that he has learned much from them as a farmer. 'We must work together and live together in this area,' declares Ngobe. As with the Moletele, the sense of contradiction is only apparent. Mr Ngobe, like black farmers throughout the (former) Transvaal, is a practical man: a farmer without a farm, he is willing to acknowledge those who taught him 'the ideology' of farming beyond the subsistence farming of his people, enabling him to have markets with other communities and to be in a position to both assist others and be assisted in times of drought. At the same time, Ngobe denounces the injustice of having had his land taken away from him, obviating his knowledge and skills, and asserts his claim to a 'proper' farm. Thus, while he affirms that he 'does not hate them,' he asserts that 'they mustn't tell themselves or anyone else that it's their Fatherland!' The theme of prophetic pragmatism is again in evidence.

At the same time it must be stated that not all those who were dispossessed under apartheid are inclined to balance the prophetic and the pragmatic in their critique of the *Die Vaderland* rhetoric of the Boers. Harry Makubire of Alexandra, one of the leaders of the Save Alex Campaign of the 1970s, which succeeded in winning a reprieve for Alexandra Township in 1979 following the forced removal of 45,000 Alexandrans in the 1960s, took a harder line in an interview in his home early in 1994. Coughing heavily, fighting for the breath to say the words, he described the right of Alexandrans to hold title (freehold) to their plots of land, before moving on to address the conflict of patriarchies more directly:

In Alexandra a person bought a property. He owned it. He had a title deed. In the rural areas, he got the land because of good behaviour and by being an asset to the community. It was leased from the chief. He would not pay rent, but he had some obligations which the chief would require of him.

The 1913 Land Act dispossessed Africans, but not in Alexandra. In a way, it can be said that the 1913 Land Act did not hit Alex until 1958. However, the Group Areas Act did affect Alex from 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Willis Ngobe and Lion Chiloane, Dingleydale, Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, 6 April, 1994, pp.11-12 (italics mine).



To this day Boers say, 'This is my land. *Die Vaderland*.' But their fathers are from Holland! *With me, it is not my fatherland. It is my great, great, great, great, great grandfather's land!* So if it's only your fatherland, you can push off!<sup>18</sup>

Mr Makubire's genealogical historical argument elicited strong support and not a little laughter when it was quoted in rural communities, and serves as a corrective to any notion that the manifest willingness of black South Africans to share the land with white South Africans is an uncritical reflex arising from a still-internalised oppression or the mere submission of the still-landless to the ongoing power of their dispossessors in the transition period. The inclusivity of their vision stems from the enduring influence of the African communal conceptualisation and spirituality of land, decades of resistance to the dispossessive exclusivity of apartheid and a prophetic pragmatism with respect to land restitution as discussed above.

Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev. Kenosi Mofokeng of ASCA take the argument a step further. While they allow white South Africans a home in Africa through 'naturalisation', they assert that the 'bottom line' is that the land belongs to 'aboriginal' Africans, and note trenchantly that from the time of their arrival it has been the whites themselves who have reinforced the point that they were *not* African but European - even though they had been 'accepted as people' in Africa by Africans:

**NH Ngada:** So definitely, in this country the land belongs to the Africans! The truth is something that is really unpalatable to some, but we have to stick to it. No matter what anybody says! But because there has been this overpowering of our people in our history since 1652 we are having to say: oh well, the generations of those intruders are now supposed to be called 'Africans'. That is not the bottom line! The bottom line is: this country belongs to the Africans! And I don't refute the fact that those people who were born here who know no other land, those people of another colour who know no other land except South Africa, are now Africans. I don't refute that, I agree with that. I have got no qualms about it. But what I say is that the bottom line is: this country belongs to Africans.

**Q:** So, if Mandela says, 'De Klerk is a son of the soil,' like he said in his inaugural address as President -

**NH Ngada:** - By naturalisation.

**Q:** In that he was born here, and his father, and so on.

**NH Ngada:** Yes.

**Q:** I'm trying to understand here in what sense descendants of Europeans who were born here, who may have been here for some generations now -

**NH Ngada:** - Sure.

**Q:** - can be said to be South Africans and not Europeans.

**NH Ngada:** They are South Africans, but their behaviour and whatever they are doing -

**Q:** They forfeit it?

**NH Ngada:** They cannot forfeit their being South Africans. They cannot repeat that. Because where else should they go? Nowhere else! They know nobody else! No other land but this one. But it must be clear to us that it is the generations of the oppressors! That must be clear.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr Harry Makubire, 1 Roosevelt St., Alexandra, 6 January, 1994, p.8 (italics mine). Mr Makubire passed away in December of 1994, and was mourned by thousands, both within Alexandra and beyond. His commitment to Alexandra, its history and its people, was unwavering. He is sorely missed.

It's up to them now!

Because in African culture, in my home, in my clan, if somebody from another clan comes in and stays with us and grows up here and everything is done here - And although he is not the Ngada from the Ngada clan, but he becomes, that person and his children, the members of the clan. No, but it is a well-known fact that they don't belong to this clan. Although they can still stay here and do everything in this clan - but their identity!

**Q:** They are sojourners?

**NH Ngada:** Yes. Exactly... I want to make it clear: that part of the white people in this country who are born here and for whom everything is here, it is not denied that they are Africans in that sense. But the bottom line is that this country is for the aboriginals in this country.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Another problem is that these foreigners who came from that 1652 up to now, perhaps there wouldn't have been this problem that they are white, they are not real Africans and whatnot, if only *they* did not make it clear that they *don't belong* here!

**Q:** Yes.

**NH Ngada:** 'Europeans Only!'

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** It is they themselves who did these things, because they were accepted as people, but they acted as -

**NH Ngada:** Foreigners.

**Q:** 'Europeans Only' - their own signs said it.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** 'Europeans Only. And this is not Europe!

**Q:** They came and tried to change Africa into Europe.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Europe.

**NH Ngada:** Into Europe.<sup>19</sup>

Archbishop Ngada's reflections on what and who is 'African' are invaluable: he distinguishes between 'the aboriginals of this country' and those who, having 'overpowered our people in our history since 1652' are 'now supposed to be called "Africans".' While he does not 'refute' that the descendants of the 'intruders' are by virtue of the place of their birth Africans, and in particular South Africans, he pointedly states that they are so by 'naturalisation'. This apt turn of phrase, very much Ngada's own, may also be seen to be a diplomatic choice of words, given that the immigration of Europeans in Southern Africa was not subject to the kind of racial screening which they themselves subsequently practised. Given their 'naturalised' status, their behaviour in Africa is seen by Africans to be indicative of the merits of their claim to an 'African' identity, and while Archbishop Ngada will not say that white South Africans have by their behaviour forfeited their naturalised African-ness - for, as he asks, 'Where else can they go?' - he does make it crystal clear that 'it is up to them now': it is up to white South Africans to show that they are indeed committed to Africa and to Africans if they are not to be seen as false fathers and false Africans. For Ngada, 'the overpowering of our people in our history since 1652' in no way erases the 'bottom line': Africa is for 'aboriginal' Africans before it may be said to be for 'naturalised' Africans. Kenosi

<sup>19</sup> Second Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, African Spiritual Churches Association, ASCA Institute, Braamfontein, 27 September, 1994, pp.3-6.

Mofokeng's observation is most apposite at this point: had it not been for their ongoing and oppressive identification with Europe, the question of white South Africans being 'real Africans' would not have been such a problem. In the end it is Archbishop Ngada's 'bottom line', which he states three times, that best captures the position: 'naturalised' Africans must acknowledge that, 'This country belongs to the Africans ... (it is) for the aboriginals in this country.'

#### 4.1.2 False Fathers in the Conflict of Patriarchies

##### 4.1.2.1 False Europeans Fathers

One line of approach to the conflict of patriarchies and its concomitant conflict of histories, memories and identities, is offered by V.Y. Mudimbe in *The Idea of Africa* (1994). In a discussion of 'The Death of False Fathers' in Africa, Mudimbe asks the following searching questions:

What if the father to which you have subjected yourself is an impostor: a false father who wrongly usurped the position of authority? What happens then to the son? What about the status of memory: if I'm confronting a false father who has imposed a false word on me, what sort of memory am I rejecting? This has long been the case in colonised Black Africa: Having been drilled from textbooks that speak of 'our ancestors, the Gauls,' what happens when you wake up and discover that your ancestors were not the Gauls? Do you remain silent - or shout yourself hoarse? What are the implications here for a practice and politics of patrimony and tradition?<sup>20</sup>

These questions are asked in the context of Mudimbe's reading of the work of Bernadette Cailler on the Caribbean writer Edouard Glissant.<sup>21</sup> At issue for both Cailler and Mudimbe is 'the experience of history for someone who is excluded from the very archives of history.' 'What does it mean,' asks Mudimbe, 'to reflect upon the meaning of history for someone like Glissant, someone who has no choice but to think within the French tradition yet who cannot forget that his ancestors came to the Caribbean as slaves?' He then quotes Cailler, introducing the term 'false fathers':

This crisis buries its roots deeply in the death of fathers (false fathers), producers of discourses that have been coded in advance; a crisis in which the discourses of love are eroded by holes on every side, and in which the myths of filiation grow indistinct; a crisis in which, each day, the connection requires suffering, an opening out onto make-believe.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa*, p.192. We will return to the patriarchal overtones of Mudimbe's 'politics of patrimony and tradition' in chapter seven.

<sup>21</sup> Cailler, B. *Conquérants de la nuit nue: Edouard Glissant et l'Histoire antillaise*, Tübingen, 1988.

<sup>22</sup> Bernadette Cailler, quoted in Mudimbe, *Idea*, p.191.

Following Cailler, Mudimbe embarks on an African reading of false fathers, loveless discourses and historical marginalisation, involving an analysis of the 'domestication' of competing African memories. 'The project of this book,' Mudimbe writes in the Preface, 'comes from a reaction I had when I read (Willy Bal's) June 1990 report to the monthly meeting of the Belgian Academy of Literature on what it means ... to read oneself as a margin in narratives conceived and written by those who have discursive power.'<sup>23</sup> Those who have this discursive power, the 'false fathers' for Cailler, are identified by Mudimbe as the colonial European fathers of 'African' history and ideation. In a chapter entitled 'Domestication and the Conflict of Memories,' Mudimbe describes the colonisation of the memories of Africa as follows:

Two types of society confront one another in the colonial experience, each with its own memory. The colonial system is coherent, seems monolithic, and is supported by its expansionist practices. It faces a multitude of African social formations with different, often particularist memories competing with each other. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, colonisation cohesively binds the diverse, often antagonistic, collective memories of many African cultures. Offering and imposing the desirability of its own memory, colonisation promises a vision of progressive enrichment to the colonised.<sup>24</sup>

One does not have to search very far for documentary evidence of the relation between discursive and dispossessive power in Southern Africa, as we will see in the consideration below of the theological, anthropological and political elaboration of the justifying rationale of guardianship and trusteeship. A painfully clear example of the discursive power of false fathers in Africa comes from the pen of V. W. Hiller, the Government Archivist of Southern Rhodesia at the time of the publication of *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat 1829-1860* (2 vols). The two volumes, edited by JPR Wallis, comprise the first number in the Oppenheimer Series, published by the Government Archive of Southern Rhodesia and printed in Glasgow for Chatto and Windus in 1945. Hiller's *Preface to the Oppenheimer Series*, dated 5 May, 1944, Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, is a classic of colonial patriarchal historiography:

Rhodesia has often been named the country without a past; in reality it was here that the first glimmer of European civilisation began to dawn in Southern Africa a century before the settlement of the Cape of Good Hope. Its story opens at the beginning of the sixteenth century with the building of a fort at Sofala by the Portuguese who bartered with the people of Monomotapa for gold dug from such primitive mines as Carl Mauch brought to light centuries later. On the heels of such secular adventures came missionaries, first Jesuit, then Dominican, to proselytise among the natives; they made valiant attempts to establish

<sup>23</sup> Mudimbe, *Idea*, p. xvii.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129.



themselves, but owing to the decline of Portugal and consequent lack of protection they were eventually compelled to retreat to the coast in the early part of the nineteenth century. Then came a short hiatus, followed by the advent of Robert Moffat and the establishment of a permanent mission in Matabeleland. Next came hunters, traders and concession seekers, until ultimately Cecil John Rhodes, realising the potential value of the north, saw fit to appropriate it for the British Empire.<sup>25</sup>

Mr Hiller's Preface, its aspiration to comprehensiveness notwithstanding, betrays an indication, however slight, of the internal difficulties of a history which seeks to be *the* history; even *History*; an indication that even the Historicity of the false European fathers, so totalising and homologising in prospect, has always had its internal tensions and incoherencies. The 'short hiatus' in the penultimate sentence of the opening paragraph of Hiller's Preface points to just such an incoherence. There is a gap in History between the forced (by the Monomotapa?) retreat to the coast of the Portuguese and the 'advent', not merely the arrival, of the British in the form of Robert Moffat. The 'permanency' of Moffat's mission is thus foregrounded, a necessary emphasis in a story of conquest and settlement, but also a signal that for Hiller the 'hiatus' in History had ended, and that it had been ended by the British, *his* people. As for Rhodes himself, that his 'appropriation' of the 'north' (the perspective is from Cape Town), following the further arrivals of the 'hunters, traders and concession (land) seekers', is presented as the 'ultimate' act in Hiller's Preface is perfectly consistent with the landed interests and proprietary teleology of the History of the false European fathers in Africa. This teleology notwithstanding, the Government Archivist of Southern Rhodesia has himself identified a hiatus in the History (Oppenheimer Series) of Rhodesia. The coherence of

<sup>25</sup> V.W. Hiller in JPR Wallis, ed., *The Matabele Journals of Robert Moffat, Volume One: 1829-1854*, London, 1945, p. vii. Mr. Hiller's preface is an invitation to the meta-narrative of false European fathers in Africa. Rhodesia's past, debated and apparently denied until Mr Hiller so helpfully provides his English readership with the real ('in reality') story, is asserted in terms of the arrival in Southern Africa of 'European civilisation'. Not only this, for this is all too predictable and a common-place for his readers, but it is asserted that it was 'here' in Rhodesia that a 'glimmer' of that civilisation first 'dawned' in Southern Africa. Hiller trumpets this pride of place for Rhodesia, over its southern rival in the Cape. The 'people of Monomotapa' are mentioned, but only with respect to the gold-digging efforts, and later the proselytising efforts, of the Europeans. Mr. Hiller displays no sense of irony here, for while the people of Monomotapa are acknowledged as having existed before the arrival of the Europeans, they cannot be said by Mr Hiller to have comprised a pre-European past for Rhodesia, for Rhodesia, as its name proclaims, is very much a European construct. The question of the region having a 'past', of the people of Monomotapa having a 'past', is not addressed. History for Hiller begins with the arrival of the Europeans. The references to a fort, the Portuguese, gold, and mining efforts in the sentence which begins, 'Its story opens at the beginning of the sixteenth century...', is programmatic, even archetypal, for the age of exploration, invasion and conquest. That the missionaries follow the 'secular adventurers' (is Hiller judging them?, celebrating them?), and that their fortunes are linked to the strength of the presence of their foreign state in the region, is portentous, as is the introduction at this point of the term 'natives', which exists in the colonial lexicon as a code indicative of a paternalistic form of racism, part of the language of the conflict of patriarchies. The 'decline' of Portugal is not investigated - for a Rhodesian archivist it is part of the preamble.

History only *seems* monolithic. The 'hiatus', once acknowledged, serves to subvert the History even as it is being introduced - exposing its bias and constructedness.

That an African critique of European History in Africa existed is beyond doubt, and increasingly we are (re)discovering its documentation. King Moshoeshe I of the Basotho, for example, countering the historiography of the Boers encroaching on his kingdom in the 1850s, is recorded as having stated:

When we drive the Boers' cattle, sheep and horses in war, they call that stealing. When they drive ours, they call it soft names. They say they recapture or replace their stolen ones ... To us, capturing the enemies' property in war is one way of self-protection. More than that, to us, all the property reared and nurtured on land stolen from us remains our property. Are whites not larger thieves, for they are also stealing black man's land from the Cape Colony to here and calling it theirs?' (in Pheko 1984: 64).

The colonial meta-narrative in Africa did not fully succeed in 'domesticating' African histories and memories, and in South Africa great irony, not to mention suspicion, attends its efforts. That there were conflicting African memories to exploit, from a colonial and apartheid point of view, in South Africa is acknowledged, the *mfecane* (*difaqane*) being the most obvious.<sup>26</sup> But in seeking to exploit divisions and conflicts between and among Africans, especially with respect to the land (i.e. the tribally-based bantustan policy of 'grand' apartheid, coupled with a tribal approach to the delineation of sectional boundaries within the black townships in the urban and peri-urban areas administered under the Group Areas Act and associated legislation), the authors and enforcers of apartheid created a crucible from which emerged a new common narrative and memory among black South Africans: that of dispossession and resistance. In seeking to further division, which they undoubtedly did, they also furthered unification in opposition to their totalising programme of racial segregation, economic exploitation and the serial alienation of people from their ancestral lands and from each other. Govan Mbeki, analysing the background to the formation of the African National Congress in 1912, following the Act of Union (1910) and the preceding century of 'Wars of Dispossession,' foregrounds the issue of African unity:

The formation of the South African Native Convention in 1909 marked a watershed. The convention drew together all the black political groups which had operated in the four colonies...Even before the formation of the Union [1910] the need to unite in order to fight

<sup>26</sup> The *mfecane* (Nguni), *difaqane* (Sotho): the 'crushing' associated with the consolidation and expansion of the Zulu kingdom in the 1820s, which scattered rival African tribes and polities northwards beyond the Limpopo River, and north-westwards into the mountain fastness of Moshoeshe's emerging Basotho Kingdom, killing thousands and displacing tens of thousands in its faminous wake. See Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*, Oxford, 1994, pp.13-14, for a critical discussion of the state of the debate concerning the causes and implications of the *difaqane*; and TRH Davenport, *South Africa: A Modern History*, 3rd edition, Cape Town, 1988, pp.12-21. See especially Davenport's exposé of the 'myth of the empty Highveld,' pp.14-15.

effectively against determined attacks on the political rights of Africans by the alliance of Boers and British had become apparent.

The launching of the South African Native National Congress on 8 January, 1912 (later renamed the African National Congress) was thus the culmination of a process that had started before Union. Emphasising the dire need for unity which would have to cut across and replace all hitherto ethnically based organisational structures, Pixley ka I. Seme - one of the founders of the ANC - declared: 'The demon of racialism, the aberrations of the Xhosa-Fingo feud, the animosities that exist between Zulus and Tsongas, between the Basutos and every other African must be buried and forgotten... We are one people.'<sup>27</sup>

Mbeki goes on to quote the *Land Act Song* ('i-Land Act') as evidence of popular support for the call to unity in the struggle against dispossession:

Sikhalela Izwe Lakithi  
Sikhalela Izwe Lakithi  
Elathathwa ngamaGalajana.  
Zulu - Mxhosa - Msotho  
Hlanganani.

We cry for our country  
We cry for our country  
Which was taken by robbers.  
Zulu - Xhosa - MoSotho.  
Unite.<sup>28</sup>

Such unity, however, was no easy proposition, and not only because of the exploitability of tribal divisions in the post-*difaqane* period between and among Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Pedi, Swazi, Shangaan, Pulana and others. Successive white governments also exploited divisions *within* tribes, targeting chiefs and their headmen for special attention - seeking to weaken, co-opt and/or corrupt the traditional chieftaincy through the use of financial and physical power, and arrogating to themselves the legal capacity to make chiefly appointments in cases where the legitimate chief resisted their efforts.

#### 4.1.2.2 False African Fathers

At this point it is necessary, however painfully, to remember that some of the African fathers, among them many chiefs and headmen, 'sold out' and co-operated with the false white fathers in the dispossession of their people. They are subsequently included among those

<sup>27</sup> Govan Mbeki, *The Struggle of Liberation in South Africa: A Short History*, University of the Western Cape Mayibuye History Series, No.13, Cape Town, 1992, p.25.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.26. The *Land Act Song* ('i-Land Act') was written by Reuben T. Caluza following the passage of the Natives Land Act in 1913, and is widely quoted in the documentation of the resistance struggle against dispossession. Daniel Kunene, writing in the 1980s of the importance of language in the struggle for liberation in South Africa, makes the point that while African prose, largely in the English language, was closely controlled by white publishers and 'middlemen', written poetry and song were less inhibited by white criticism and censor, retaining much of the outspokenness and daring of the oral poetry and song which lay behind them - and this because they were written not in English but in the first languages of black South Africans (e.g. Sotho, Tswana, Zulu and Xhosa). Of '*i-Land Act*', Kunene says, 'Many similar songs were written by composers whose intention was to keep up the African's awareness of his plundered rights. Needless to say that, for the fifties and seventies to have had the greatest possible impact, they should not have forgotten or ignored these earlier artists of the struggle.' See Daniel Kunene, 'Language, Literature and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa,' in E. Jones, E. Palmer and M. Jones, eds., *The Question of Language in African Literature Today*, London, 1991, pp.37-50. See also L. Callinicos, *Working Life 1886-1940*, Johannesburg, 1987, p.18.

regarded as 'false fathers,' as many of the group interviews in the communities indicate, particularly with respect to 'chiefs' who were part of the dispossession and forced removal of their people.<sup>29</sup> This too is part of the *memoria passionis* in the communities. Many chiefs were indeed true to their people, resisting and suffering with them, and were deposed and/or more permanently eliminated as a result.<sup>30</sup> False (illegitimate) chiefs took their place, selected and established by order of the white regime. A litany of legislation beginning in 1951 with the Bantu Authorities Act and including the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 granted the state, in one of the more incommensurable and corrosive prerogatives assumed under apartheid, the powers to appoint African chiefs, who then functioned as salaried agents in the employ of the central government.<sup>31</sup> In rural communities the legislation and the complicity of traditional leaders in its implementation divided and dispossessed, and eventually created the deserts of deprivation known as the bantustans from the many pieces of territory known previously as the Native Reserves. While the falseness of the black fathers may thus be said to have occurred in conjunction with that of the white fathers,<sup>32</sup> this does not obviate their complicity and responsibility in the dispossession and impoverishment of their people.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See for example the Groups Interviews with the Moletete, Mashilane, and Mogopa Communities, and the *Land Charter*, especially sections 5 (Local Government) and 8 (Political Rights and Violence), of the Community Land Conference, Bloemfontein, 12 February, 1994.

<sup>30</sup> Among the few who survived to lead their people back to their land is Chief Arthur Lebusa Monnakgotla of the Bakubung ba Ratheo, who, following imprisonment and relocation, led his people back to Molote on March 1, 1994.

<sup>31</sup> See Elaine Unterhalter's discussion of Bantustan Policy and chieftaincy in *Forced Removal: The Division, Segregation and Control of the People of South Africa*, London, 1987, pp.15-26. With respect to apartheid legislation and white rule through African chiefs, Unterhalter rightly makes linkages between the colonial era and the legislative programme of the National Party in the 1950s: 'The bantustan programme was initiated in 1959 with the Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act. It drew on the earlier colonial system of government through chiefs which had been resurrected in the 1951 Bantu Authorities Act. This act had placed local government in the 'reserves' in the hands of the chiefs, village headmen and councillors, all of whom were salaried officials, accountable to the Bantu Affairs Department. These local officials were in charge of the maintenance of roads, schools, law and order, pension and welfare applications and land allocation. The Promotion of Bantu Self-Government Act of 1959 incorporated these features of 'reserve' administration and devolved greater executive powers to eight regional bantustan administrations (later increased to ten) (Unterhalter 1987: 15-16). See also the discussion in Geoffrey Bindman, ed., *South Africa: Human Rights and the Rule of Law*, London, 1988, pp.22-27. Bindman, on behalf of the International Commission of Jurists, states: 'The first Bantustans were thus born in the ruins of the old native reserves, which were economic deserts. The first step in creating the Bantustans was the Bantu Authorities Act 1951, which established tribal, regional and territorial authorities with limited powers within the reserves. The pick of the tribal leaders soon became salaried officials - local controlling agents on behalf of the central government. Several of those who had been in the forefront of resistance to colonialism became protagonists of the white apartheid government (Bindman 1988: 23).

<sup>32</sup> A case in point is the infamous letter of Emile Rolland to the Cape Colony, dated 30 March, 1868, Aliwal North, and entitled, 'Notes on the Political and Social Position of the Basuto Tribe.' The occasion for the letter seems to have been the treaty between King Moshoeshoe and the British which established Basutoland (Lesotho) as a British Protectorate, though with significant loss of arable land to the encroaching Boers. Rolland, son of the pioneering missionary Samuel Rolland, detailed a strategy for the British concerning how best to weaken the powers of the Basotho chieftaincy. Identifying land as one of the major instruments of



The interview with the Mashilane Land Committee provided a deeply-felt example of the segregation of the land under apartheid effected through the manipulation of the chieftaincy:

**Male Voice:** The father is looking to - he is taking us back. Worried about the graves. That is right. We need a corrective to all this. This division in land. We need to remember how it was long before. There were no boundaries. There were no fences. But now these Boers were coming here it seems from 1965. They had to put some boundaries here. That's why they had to cause that this Elandsfontein had to have two chiefs. It is because of the Boers. So our chief, well he has got a problem, it's one: some of our graves are under a certain *kgoshi* (chief) there now.

**Q:** Oh, a different chief?

**Male Voices:** Yes!

**Male Voice:** Where the graves are, does not fall under our *kgoshi* now. And the one who is there where the graves are, they do not belong to his forefathers!

**Q:** The Boers put him there?

**Male Voice:** Yes.

**Q:** To divide you.

**Male Voices:** Yes.

**Older Male Voice** [in English]: Yes! So, the grave of our first chief lies over there, on the other side. And that very grave, which is ours, does not belong to Mashilane (the *kgoshi*) now.

**Q:** So, even you must negotiate with the other chief -

**Male Voice:** - Yes.

**Q:** - to go and visit the ancestors?

**Male Voice:** No. Just that grave only - it's a thorn in the flesh. We don't forget it. Because our forefather's grave is -

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power and control in the hands of chiefs, Rolland advocates the establishment of a class of Basotho who hold land in their own right as private property - an alien discourse in a subversive strategy: 'It is evident from the preceding remarks that when a private individual becomes possessed of property and either contents himself with one wife or acquires several, he is placed in a position of comparative independence with regard to the chief. It is evident also, that in order to diminish the influence of the chief, private individuals should be encouraged to possess property, so as to lessen the comparative disparity of wealth betwixt them and their chiefs.' Rolland then goes on for several pages detailing how this might be accomplished (Emile Rolland, 1868, photocopy of hand-written original, Morija Archives, Lesotho, pp.9-13). See also L. Machobane, *Government and Change in Lesotho 1800 - 1966: A Study of Political Institutions*, London, 1990.

<sup>33</sup> A compelling narrative account of the corruption and co-optation of traditional chiefs in the 1950s may be found in Lauretta Ngcobo's novel of the land and its people, *And They Didn't Die* (London, 1990). The following excerpt is part of a speech to the women of Sigageni by Dr. Nosizwe Morena [her name is symbolic, a conjoining of Xhosa [*Nosizwe*: 'Mother of the Nation'] and Sotho [*Morena*: 'Chief'] a women's leader and 'the guiding spirit in the whole district of Ixopo,' early in the novel. The women are gathered in the shade of the village church/school. Following the singing of a hymn and an opening prayer, Dr. Morena speaks of the dispossession and impoverishment of her people, including the following: 'Once in our history kings and chiefs were influential people, leaders who were highly respected and loved by our people. The government is violating this age-old relationship between the people and their leaders. They are using our chiefs against us. The chiefs are no longer ordained by the will of the people; most of them are now appointed by the government to serve their interests. And slowly a deadly confrontation has developed between the people and their chiefs under the Bantu Authorities Act ... The main aim here is to divide our people, not only from their chiefs, but to create a division of the few privileged land owners and the land-less mass. First they took the great mass of our land and gave it to white people; now they must use the pittance they left us to bribe our chiefs to favour a few and to discard the majority of our people in these land-less colonies - the ultimate dispossession. And our chiefs agree! Great new powers have been given to the chiefs to persuade and to deceive and to force people into accepting the government's apartheid schemes' (Ngcobo 1990:45). It is no accident that a novel written by a woman should include so scathing an assessment of both the white regime and traditional leaders.

**Q:** There.

**Male Voice:** It lies there. And that grave does not belong to us (Mashilane), it belongs to another man.

**Q:** And the other chief?

**Male Voice:** [indignantly] Who is that 'other chief'?

[Others come in at this point, stating a name, but questioning that he is a chief.]

**Q:** He is not the real chief?

**Male Voice:** He is not the -

[Several voices at once, some laughter.]

**Q:** So was he put up by the white government?

**Male Voice:** Yes he is!

**Male Voice:** Apartheid!

**Male Voice:** Apartheid!

**Bright Mashego:** What you're telling us, it's like down in Moletete's place. The original chiefs, those who have got the chieftain rights, were sabotaged by those who were nominated or elected by the state himself. Because in the constitution the state president has got the rights to nominate the chiefs.

**Q:** A white man nominating African chiefs! What is that?!

**Several Voices:** Apartheid!

**Bright Mashego:** Yes, they used those ones to belittle those original ones.

**Older Male Voice:** That is why I say we are very much worried about that grave. Because that grave does not now belong to our chief!<sup>34</sup>

**Q:** Now, after the April elections, how do you see things changing? Or do you see that things will change?

**Male Voice** [in English]: Now after elections in April things will happen in the correct way. We must just inform them, let them know that *we must suspect the history of this land*. That when coming here they know that there were no boundaries - they must respect the first chief, which is Mashilane. And then thereafter they must always negotiate with him when coming to some problems. But in the first place we want them to respect him, because they know that this is the man.<sup>35</sup>

The important statement, 'we must suspect the history of this land' is aimed at the boundaries and false chiefs which white History has imposed on the land. Indeed, white men making boundaries on African land and appointing African chiefs is seen to be the very definition of apartheid. Thus the optimism expressed concerning the capacity of the election to usher in an era wherein 'things will happen in the correct way' must be seen as one which does not forget the role of suspicion, even in a moment of affirmation. This said, the suspicion seems to be directed solely at the past, however. Statements like, 'After the elections in April things will happen in the correct way,' and 'We must just inform them...' do not acknowledge sufficiently the contingency inherent in the transition period. Other communities, notably the

<sup>34</sup> The point being made is that the grave of the first Mashile Chief should belong to the Mashilane people, but because of the divisions of people and of land made by the apartheid regime, the grave now lies on land under the control of another 'man', not a legitimate Pulana chief but an 'imposee' of the apartheid regime. When he says the grave does not 'belong' to the Mashilane, he is not saying that it is not their grave, but that it is no longer within their territory, following the boundaries drawn by the Boers as part of apartheid.

<sup>35</sup> Mashilane Interview, op cit., pp.17-19 (italics mine).

Moletete, Leroro, Mogopa and Bakubung, placed less reliance on the elections and more on their own praxis at the local level.

A more tragic story is told by the Moletete of Blyde River Canyon, whose chief Anias Chiloane, was murdered, it was alleged, by his brother George at the time of the removals. It is entirely consistent with reports throughout the former Transvaal that the apartheid regime is seen (by his mother and by the Moletete) as having <sup>had</sup> a hand in the deed:

**Laitos Malatjie:** All right. Hold on, I want to give him the whole story. The Boers came here and said to us: you must know that as from now you are moving from here. You have to go. Then we asked them: where are we going?! They said: Acornhoek. Buffelshoek. We refused. No, that place, we don't know it. Where is our chief? They answered: we have seen the chief. We then said: no, we want him to come and we will discuss it with him. Go back and tell him, so that he must come. They turned back. They just went away, but the next day they came back to us. They said: we don't have anything to do with your chief! He will remain here on the farms. You have to move away from this place, you people. We then asked them to give us a place closer to here, because we don't know that other place, but they refused. They said: you must move out! If you resist, we will burn your houses! We will burn everything! They said: at the Setlhare places we have used bulldozers. Here we are going to burn everything down! Then you are going to lose your properties. Your livestock. You are going to leave everything behind. At the end of it, everything will remain behind. We were terrorised and we had to accept. Because they were going to burn our houses. We've got an experience of what happened at Setlhare's place. We saw them bulldozing everything down. So with us, they were going to burn our houses down. We were so frightened that we gave in, and moved. We asked them, for one last time, to give us a place closer to this one. But they said nothing.

**Q:** I have been told that the *kgoshi* was murdered. Is it true? Was the chief murdered?

**Enos Chiloane:** Which chief could he mean?

**Others:** Anias, perhaps. Anias Chiloane.

**Q:** He was the chief at the time of the removal? Anias Chiloane?

**Laitos Malatjie and Enos Chiloane:** Yes.

**Q:** Who was it that killed him?

**Enos Chiloane:** His brother, George.

**Q:** His brother! Why did George kill him?

**Enos Chiloane and Petrus Makhubedu:** That is the way the Boers do their work.

**Wilfred Chiloane:** He was fighting with the Boers here. He did not want to move. It was his land. He said he would die here. Then the Boers used his brother to kill him.

**Q:** Why did the brother agree to do it?

**Wilfred Chiloane:** Because of the Boers, who wanted the *kgoshi* to be removed.

**Q:** Did they give George money?

**Wilfred Chiloane and Petrus Makhubedu:** Yes, they gave him money.

**Q:** To kill his brother.

**All:** Yes.

**Q:** Chief Anias - did you support him?

**All:** Yes, we were supporting him!

**Q:** He tried to resist the removal.

**Enos Chiloane:** Yes.

**All:** Yes.

**Q:** Aow!

**Bright Mashego:** Chief Anias was already resident at Eden at the time of the removals. He stayed there, resisting the removal, until he was killed. The Moletete were then scattered throughout the Hoedspruit/Mogologolo district.

**Petrus Makhubedu:** At the time of our removal from here there was no road. Because of

this, some of us just went away on our own, and left our livestock behind. Some went as far as Steenveldt Farm. Some were transported to Buffelshoek. Others didn't have any transport. We ended up moving in different directions. Some went to Elandsfontein (Matibidi, above the escarpment). Others went to Bushbuckridge. Thank you (*Thobela*).

**Bright Mashego:** The issue around Eden is that there were other people who were already at Eden with the chief. So, the people couldn't go there. People moved out from Blyderivierspoort to different areas. Also there was already a threat of removals at Eden. That's why the chief was killed.

**Q:** You are saying that the Boers gave the chief's brother money to kill the chief? How do you know this?

**Enos Chiloane:** There was an investigation while George was in jail. But at the end the judgement was that he should be hanged. After that they called his mother to come and sign for the judgement, the ruling. It was his mother that indicated to the Mapulana nation that the death of Kgoshi Anias was really a plot of some kind. His mother said, 'You should not hang my son, you should release him. Because I know that my son was bought, to kill my son his brother. So I don't want to cry twice. Let him live.' Even now, George is still alive.<sup>36</sup>

Bringing the story up to date, we find that the current Chief of the Moletele, Abuti Chiloane, is acting to block the return of his people to their ancestral lands. On Wednesday, 18 May, 1994, one week after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as State President, ten members of the Moletele Land Restoration Committee re-occupied their ancestral land at Van Nickerk's Resort in the Blyderivierspoort Nature Reserve - ostensibly to clean the graves of their ancestors, those graves which had survived the building of the Blydepoort Dam which had occasioned their removal.<sup>37</sup> The men had remained on the land, sleeping rough in the Conservation Office compound. When we met the vanguard on Friday morning, 20 May, they were just finishing a meeting with five Conservation Officers concerning their ongoing occupation of the site. The Chief Conservation Officer for the Blyderivierspoort Nature Reserve, a Mr Theron, had called in Conservation Officers from the Eastern Transvaal Regional Office to help him deal with the Moletele return. Present on behalf of the Moletele Community was Barnas Mashego, the Chairperson of the Drakensberg Farmers Union. The Moletele Chief, Abuti Chiloane, had opposed the return, and had warned the Conservation Officers in writing that they should not allow the men on the site to clean the graves. This was the issue being debated when we arrived. Further, Abuti Chiloane had gone

<sup>36</sup> Group Interview with the Vanguard of the Moletele Return to their Ancestral Land in the Blyde River Canyon, Conservation Office Compound, Blyderivierspoort Natuurreservaat, 20 May, 1994, pp.3-5.

<sup>37</sup> The names of the Moletele vanguard are as follows: Enos Chiloane (chair), Wilfred Chiloane (Sec), Petrus Makhubedu, Abram Molobela, Renius Malatjie, Abram Moyeng, Laitos Malatjie, William Morele, Laxon Mahlakoane, and Enos Moyema. Barnas Mashego and Cedric Setwane of the Drakensberg Farmers' Union were present in an advocacy role, locked in debate with the local Conservation Officers. The community's lawyer, Durkje Gilfillan of the Legal Resources Centre in Pretoria, had not yet been informed of the return. Our interview was conducted in the compound following the departure of the conservation officers for another meeting related to the return. Following the interview, we purchased food and a meal was shared together. The returnees had not eaten since the morning of the previous day.



in person to the site to tell the men to withdraw from the place. The returnees, while they recognise that Abuti Chiloane is their chief, did not think his action was within his jurisdiction as traditional leader. At the same time it is not of unambiguous significance that Enos Chiloane, chairperson of the Moletele Land Restoration Committee, is also an *induna* (headman) of the community.<sup>38</sup> In late 1996 the Moletele are still not back on their ancestral land, and are waiting while their Land Claim (including some 27 farms in the Lowveld to the north and east of the Blyde River Canyon) works its way through the CRLR.

Following centuries of tradition-eviscerating legislation and decades of the corruption and co-optation of traditional chiefs, and given the myriad complications and rivalries arising from lengthy stays in state-manipulated resettlement areas, it should come as no surprise that the 800 delegates to the Community Land Conference in February 1994 found it necessary to pass the following resolution:

Chiefs must become accountable to the people - we do not want chiefs imposed on us. Chiefs must not impose levies on the land unless the community agrees. Chiefs should not have control of land allocation. Committees must be elected by people in the community to administer and control land affairs.<sup>39</sup>

The identity and role of the traditional chieftaincy continues to be ambiguous in the new South Africa. While it may be noted that the CLC delegates were not calling for the end of the chieftaincy as such (some of the delegates were chiefs who had struggled and suffered with their people), they were uncompromising in their demand that the chieftaincy be legitimate in terms of traditional criteria (and not imposed, whether by the state or by self-imposition), accountable and consultative, and that land allocation be controlled by a democratic structure elected by community members.

A key aspect of the debate on chieftaincy involves the debate concerning women and land, and the struggle of women to break through the patriarchy represented by the traditional chieftaincy. Barney Pitso, in an address to the 1994 National Conference of the SACC

<sup>38</sup> With respect to the complexities of the question of economic interest and returns to ancestral land, there is also a concern among Moletele businessmen, having established shops and custom in the Acornhoek (resettlement) area, that a complete return to the Blyde River Canyon by the community could only be accomplished at great sacrifice to themselves - a sacrifice which they are not yet convinced it would be wise for them to make at this time, having spent thirty years struggling to establish a livelihood away from their ancestral land. On the other hand, Petrus Makhubedu, a businessman in the Acornhoek region, is one of the leaders of the return.

<sup>39</sup> *Land Charter*, Section 8.5, Community Land Conference, Bloemfontein, 1994. The *Land Charter* is available from the National Land Committee, Braamfontein.

highlighted this dynamic in his discussion of the 'One Nation: Many Cultures' theme of the Inauguration of Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as State President on 10 May, 1994:

African traditional leaders have expressed alarm at what they perceive as a threat to the rights of the traditional polity as the Interim Constitution guarantees equal rights for women. Efforts to entrench the rights of so-called traditional leaders failed in the face of strong resistance from the women's lobby. Will the women's rights undermine the rights of chiefs? Especially, does it mean that women can insist on sitting in traditional councils on an equal footing with the men? Does polygamy demean women and is it consistent with the new woman of the new South Africa? <sup>40</sup>

We will return to the struggle of rural women against patriarchy in chapter seven. A consideration of false fathers, European and African, tells us that the conflict of patriarchies is not simply a matter of the oppositionality of black and white on the land. A deeper hermeneutic, one which searches for subjacent texts in the manipulation of traditional leadership, is required if an inclusive holistic relationality of land and life is to be part of the effort to get beyond the conflict of patriarchies in struggles for land restitution.

#### 4.2 Land, Trust and Hunger in the Conflict of Patriarchies

The group interview with the Mashilane Land Committee in February 1994, provided the first articulation during the research process of the ongoing importance of the theme of T/trust in rural land struggles: <sup>41</sup>

**Sinias Magopane:** We have left our chiefs' graveyards and we have not been able to go there.

**Q:** Where are those graves?

**Several Voices** (pointing towards Clermont/Blydepoort Aventura): They are there! At home!

**Q:** You can see them from here?

**Several Voices:** Yes! We know where they are!

**Q:** And who owns that land now?

**Frederick Mashile:** The land is under central.

**Q:** The central government?

**Frederick Mashile:** Yes. It is *Trust Land*. Like home.

**Sinias Magopane:** Yes, they control it and then they call it '*Trust*'! That is our situation here. <sup>42</sup>

T/trust and T/trusteeship have been key elements in both the rationale of apartheid and the articulation and praxis of resistance and restitution. On the one hand, one of the defining dispossessive discourses of the false fathers has been that of trusteeship and guardianship; on

<sup>40</sup> Barney Pitso, 'Presentation Two: Culture as Evangelisation,' in *SACC National Conference Presentations: Rev Barney N Pitso*, Johannesburg, 1994, pp.11-12.

<sup>41</sup> The term 'T/trust' is used to indicate the relation between the legislative, spiritual and inter-personal aspects of Land Trusts and T/trusteeship.

<sup>42</sup> Mashilane Land Committee Interview, op cit., pp.4-5 (italics mine).

the other, the establishment of benevolent Trusts, practising what has sought to be a trusteeship-in-community-and-solidarity, has been one of the means by which resistance struggles and, latterly, land restoration campaigns of landless communities have been facilitated. We turn now to a critical assessment of the theological and praxiological aspects of T/trust and T/trusteeship in the conflicting service of both dispossession and repossession, underdevelopment and post-return transformation. With respect to an enabling T/trust and T/trusteeship, the recent establishment of the Mogopa Trust, for example, provides a focus for the related issues of local representation, ownership and participation in community T/trusts, and co-operation and accountability between and among community members, solidarity and development organisations, the churches, and private (businesses, corporate and financial bodies) and public (government at local, provincial and national levels) structures and agencies. Our goal in this discussion is not only to deconstruct the colonial discourse of imperial T/trust, but to highlight rurally-based, inter-sectoral and interdisciplinary efforts to restore T/trust in the restoration of communities on the land. With respect to theological ethics, the locus for reflection is the '/' in 'T/trust'.

#### 4.2.1 A False and Dispossession Trust

The falseness of the European fathers in Africa, as we have seen, is more than genealogical, it is also moral - a point made often in the group interviews with the communities. Falseness is seen to inhere in the assertion of an elective indigeneity,<sup>43</sup> the associated acquisition of land by force and deception, and the subsequent establishment of an exclusionary market in land which sought to normalise the process of dispossession by receipt and title deed. The discourse of the false fathers, as has been widely observed, sought to dress the dispossession of Africans in the *haute couture* of colonial trusteeship and Christian guardianship. The land was held in assumptive trust 'on behalf of' black South Africans by Europeans who, as part of their (self-)deception, saw themselves in the role of God-sent guardians of their African 'wards' - a calling which was viewed as 'a sacred trust' (Roberts 1990: 42; NGK, 1921, in van Donk, 1994: 29), involving the leading of Africans into the light of Western (Christian) civilisation. Given the legacy of mistrust and poverty left behind by this 'imperial trust' (Roberts 1990: 43), and the current efforts of rural communities in concert with churches, and private and public sector organisations and agencies to restore enabling trust and accountable trusteeship in the new South Africa, a critique of assumptive T/trust, and

<sup>43</sup> 'Elective' in the sense that whites were perceived to be asserting a right to presence and land in Africa while at the same time denying an African identity, and dismissive of Africa and Africans: in but not of Africa.

a consideration of the theology and practical potential of enabling T/trust in the transition period is very much in order.

That the justifying rationale for a false and dispossessive trusteeship in South Africa was a complex of religio-cultural, socio-economic and political discourses is widely acknowledged, as are the linkages between Afrikaner civil religion and the elaboration of the doctrines of apartheid.<sup>44</sup> While debate continues concerning the relative influence of the various discourses within the rationale,<sup>45</sup> the thatness of the multivalent linkages between and among the theological, social-anthropological, economic and political aspects of the rationale of trusteeship, whether British colonial or Afrikaner 'civil-religious', is not at issue. We will approach the question of false T/trust and T/trusteeship through the distinct but related discourses of British colonialism and imperialism on the one hand, and the missiological-political discourse of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK), and its influence on the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 on the other.

#### 4.2.1.1 The British Colonial Discourse of T/trusteeship

One of the referents for the kind of T/trust represented in the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was the British colonial *cum* imperial discourse of trusteeship, and the related discourse of (Christian) guardianship, which together functioned as one of the justifying rationales of dispossession. In an essay entitled, 'The Imperial Mind', Andrew Roberts outlines what may be called a genealogy of trusteeship:

In Britain, converging thoughts about the opportunities, obligations and hazards of empire were crystallised in the word '*trusteeship*'. The aftermath of the war [WWI] gave this a special significance...The final distribution of the (League of Nations) mandates was not completed until 1922, but meanwhile the League had to determine the responsibilities of those to whom mandates were assigned. The African mandates were adjudged to be territories whose peoples were 'not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world'; their well-being and development was a '*sacred trust of civilisation*'.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Charles Villa-Vincencio and John De Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope: South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*, Cape Town, 1985. See in particular Jaap Durand, 'Afrikaner piety and dissent,' pp.39-51; 'Rebels and prophets: Afrikaners against the system,' pp.52-60; and David Bosch, 'The fragmentation of Afrikanerdom and the Afrikaner churches,' pp.61-73.

<sup>45</sup> See the discussion entitled, 'Afrikaner nationalism and apartheid,' in Nigel Worden, *The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid*, 1994, pp.87-94; and D. O'Meara, *Volskapitalisme: class, capital and ideology in the development of Afrikaner nationalism 1934-1948*, Cambridge, 1983.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Andrew Roberts, ed., *The Colonial Moment in Africa: Essays on the Movement of Minds and Materials, 1900-1940*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p.42 (*italics mine*); originally published as the first five thematic chapters of *The Cambridge of Africa, Volume 7, 1905-1940*, Cambridge, 1986.



The African mandates in question required, though with no way of enforcing it, that the mandated powers exert themselves to suppress slavery, and to renounce the use of forced labour for private gain and the use of African manpower to strengthen their own armed forces. They were to maintain an open door to Christian missions and the trade of other League members (a telling linkage), to refuse to grant monopolistic concessions, and to 'promote to the utmost the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants.'<sup>47</sup> Roberts, while conceding that the goals were left 'sufficiently vague,' argues that the 'code of behaviour expressed in the mandates was an implicit critique of earlier phases in colonial history ... a reassertion of the international conscience which had animated the anti-slavery conference at Brussels in 1890' (1990: 43). That this 'reassertion of international conscience' was limited in extent and efficacy, however, is something which Roberts himself is quick to note. In a statement that opens a window on the relation between material interests and authorship in the discourse of T/trusteeship, Roberts confesses, 'True, the code did not oblige Britain to change its ways; Britain, after all, had taken a lead in framing it' (1990: 43).

In the same anthology Richard Gray discusses the role of Western Christianity in the elaboration of the principle of trusteeship, arguing that the two most significant contributions of the Protestant churches to colonial policy in the inter-war period were in the development of the concept of trusteeship and the role of Christian missions in education in Africa. He highlights the role of the International Missionary Council (IMC), and in particular that of its secretary, J.H. Oldham, in 'translating the humanitarian tradition into the colonial politics of the 1920s.'<sup>48</sup> Gray goes on to define the 'principle of trusteeship' as 'colonial rule as a trust to be exercised in the interests of the subject peoples,' and presents it as having been developed by Oldham and like-minded leaders of the member churches of the IMC 'as a counter-balance to the older, and locally stronger, imperial tradition of colonial settlement.' As such, the goal was to challenge 'Smuts and other imperial strategists' who viewed specific patterns of European settlement as the 'steel framework' of white hegemony both south and north of the Zambezi (Gray, 1990: 182-3). That the 'trust' is represented by Gray as colonial rule carried out by other means, retaining a view of its intended beneficiaries as 'subject peoples,' is a telling linkage between the imperial and the would-be humanitarian in the rationale of trusteeship, a linkage which is not far from the well-meant but diminution-inducing mission

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<sup>47</sup> Kenneth Robinson, *The dilemmas of trusteeship*, London, 1965, p.4, quoted in Roberts, *ibid.*, p.43.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Gray, 'Christianity,' in Roberts, *ibid.*, p.182.

terminology of 'mother' and 'daughter' churches, a colonial code made all the more problematic by its dressing of missionary patriarchy in the language of maternity.

#### 4.2.1.2 The Missiological-Political Discourse of the Dutch Reformed Church

Mirjam van Donk, in her recent study *Land and the Church: The Case of the Dutch Reformed Churches*, traces the elaboration of a complex discourse (including theological, anthropological, economic and political elements) of race and 'trust' through the documents of the Synods, Committees and mission policy consultations of the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK). Van Donk argues that while the great commission, 'Go then to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples' (Mt 28:19-20), can be said to lie at the heart of the 'mission activities' of the NGK, including efforts to convert the 'heathen', it was a 'calling' which 'expressed itself in trusteeship'. Prominent in this interpretation of the apostolic commission is what we may call an impulse (white, Western and by no means restricted to the NGK<sup>49</sup>) to superiority: 'Christians were believed to be superior to people of other faiths. The elected (white) people were to be guardians over the uncivilised and naïve indigenous peoples (who) are described as ignorant, addicted to alcohol, indecent, and uneducated' (Van Donk, 1994b: 28). In support of this assessment, Van Donk marshals evidence from NGK documents from the 1920s-1950s. In 1921, for example, the General Mission Committee of the Cape Synod invited its counterparts from the Transvaal and Orange Free State to undertake a joint investigation, their first collaborative effort, into the 'position' of 'non-whites'. Their findings were published in English as *The DRC and the Native Problem* (1921), and included the following assertions:

... the European race must look upon the natives as a sacred trust. They are minors, whose interest we must have at heart... They constitute the 'white man's burden', which the latter must take up and courageously carry.

... The practice of the Church follows the doctrine of the State on the relation of the white and black races to each other. That doctrine is, that the white race is and must remain

<sup>49</sup> Cf. James Cochrane, *Servants of Power: The Role of the English-speaking Churches in South Africa 1903-1930*, Johannesburg, 1987. In an examination of the response of the English-speaking churches to the Land Act of 1913 Cochrane recounts a debate in the pages of *The Methodist Churchman* of 24 November 1913 between black leaders and white 'churchmen'. To its credit, the *Methodist Churchman*, while moderate in its response to the Act, admitted that '... our missionaries; and those whom we regard as Native experts have, for the most part, been silent,' and published an address by John Dube, then president of the South African Native National Congress (the forerunner of the ANC), in which he, as Cochrane notes, 'launched into a powerful attack on the complicity of the Church,' an excerpt of which follows: 'And yet you tell us that with you might is not right, that your rule of life is to live and let live; to do unto others as you would be done by; that you are children of Christ and heirs to His Kingdom, guided solely by the eternal principles of blind justice, regardless of colour and creed. What contemptible cant! What a BLASPHEMOUS FRAUD!' (Cochrane 1987: 103, emphasis as in the original).

the ruling race. The coloured and black sections of the population occupy a strictly subordinate position. This is not due, as is very generally supposed, to the accident of their colour: it is due to their lower stage of cultural development.<sup>50</sup>

In 1934, two years before the 'Fusion' government led by General JBM Hertzog passed the Native Trust and Land Act, the Native Commission of the Federal Council of Churches convened a meeting of the Dutch Reformed Churches to rationalise the various mission policies of the NGK Synods. The desired uniformity emerged from the convocation in the form of a document entitled *The Mission Policy of the Federated Dutch Reformed Churches of South Africa*, the introduction to which is indicative of the impulse to superiority inherent in the rationale of trusteeship:

The Church is deeply convinced of the fact that God, in His wise counsel, so ordained it that the first European inhabitants of this Southern corner of Darkest Africa should have been men and women with firm religious convictions, so that they and their posterity could become the bearers of the light of the Gospel to the heathen races of this continent, and therefore considers it the special privilege and responsibility of the D.R. Church of South Africa - in particular - to proclaim the Gospel to the heathen of this country.<sup>51</sup>

While the necessary deconstruction of the theological discourse of apartheid has been largely accomplished,<sup>52</sup> it is important with respect to the elaboration of the rationale of white trusteeship in South Africa to note that the 1934 *Mission Policy* advocated a comprehensive, multi-sectoral approach to mission - a total strategy as it were. Included in this far-reaching approach as 'accessory means of opening the hearts of the heathen to the Gospel' were efforts in the spheres of education, medical services, agriculture, industry and social life. The foundation of the 'separate development' doctrine of apartheid can be seen clearly in the policy's assertion of the separation of races (seen to be God-ordained - in convenient concert with the Afrikaner 'antipathy to the idea of racial fusion') and its rejection of social equality

<sup>50</sup> *The DRC and the Native Problem* (1921), quoted in van Donk, op. cit., pp.29, 32. Van Donk draws heavily on the work of Carl Borchardt in her discussion of the 1921 investigation (cf. C. Borchardt, 'Die "Swakheid van Sommige" en die Sending,' in Johann Kinghorn, ed., *Die N.G. Kerk en Apartheid*, Johannesburg, 1986). It is of significance that the 'native problem' was being debated within the DRC at the time of the sitting of the government's Stallard Commission on policy and legislation with respect to Africans. The Report of the Stallard Commission appeared in 1921, and included the now notorious passage: 'We consider that the history of the races, especially having regard to South African history, shows that the commingling of black and white is undesirable. The Native should only be allowed to enter urban areas, which are essentially the white man's creation, when he is willing to enter and minister to the needs of the white man, and should depart therefrom when he ceases so to minister.' See also the discussion in Govan Mbeki, op. cit., pp.27-31.

<sup>51</sup> *Mission Policy*, quoted in Van Donk, ibid., p.32.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. John De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vincencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Cape Town, 1983; The Kairos Theologians, *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa - The Kairos Document*, Johannesburg, 1986 (2nd edition); Itumeleng Mosala and Buti Tlhabale, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Essays in Black Theology*, Johannesburg, 1986; Mokgethi Motlhabi, *Essays on Black Theology*, published by the Black Theology Project of the University Christian Movement, Johannesburg, 1972.

'between black and white in daily life' - reflecting the rising influence within the white 'mother' churches of those who favoured complete racial segregation:

The traditional fear of the Afrikaner of equality of treatment between black and white has its origin in the antipathy to the idea of racial fusion. The church declares itself unequivocally opposed to this fusion ... Every nation has the right to be itself and to endeavour to develop and elevate itself. While the church thus declares itself opposed to social equality in the sense of ignoring differences of race and colour between black and white in daily life, it favours the encouragement and development of social differentiation and intellectual or cultural segregation, to the advantage of both sections.<sup>53</sup>

While its open rejection of social equality seems less duplicitous than the later 'separate development' discourse of apartheid, the *Mission Policy* betrays such a deceit by claiming that the development envisaged, separate and separating, would be 'to the advantage of both sections.' It is a telling observation that the 'development' which the policy encourages is the 'development of social *differentiation* and intellectual or cultural *segregation*'.

The NGK submitted its *Mission Policy* to the Hertzog government in 1934 with significant implications for the development of apartheid doctrine within the structures of the National Party.<sup>54</sup> By the time the NP won the 1948 election under DF Malan, the mission policy of the NGK had added a biblical imperative to the social-anthropological and economic considerations which were already part of its justifying rationale for apartheid, having come to the conclusion that the policy of separate development was the 'only just and scriptural solution to the race issue.'<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, while trusteeship may have been seen in the post-World War I period as a humanitarian colonial option over and against an imperialistic colonialism, it was co-opted by those favouring a more naked imperialism to the point where it became part and parcel of imperial strategy.<sup>56</sup> This was certainly the case in South Africa, wherein the rationale of trusteeship behind the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 was a coarse cloth woven from the theological/anthropological discourse of the *Mission Policy* (1934) of the NGK and the segregationist socio-economic and political discourse of the National Party within the Fusion

<sup>53</sup> *Mission Policy*, quoted in van Donk, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>54</sup> According to the Native Commission of the Federated Council of Churches, in van Donk, op. cit., p.33.

<sup>55</sup> van Donk, op. cit., p.34.

<sup>56</sup> Roberts speaks of the 'protective role of the imperial trustee,' contrasting it favourably with those who followed a 'harder' imperialistic line in Africa. Milner and Smuts are mentioned in particular, the latter having taken 'a leading part in the Paris Peace Conference, where he pressed South Africa's own claims to empire.' Milner, colonial secretary after his service in South Africa, sought to make Britain's colonial empire 'an engine of economic growth,' calling for 'investment in colonial infrastructures to boost production' (Roberts 1990: 43-44).



Government under Hertzog. It was a Trust experienced by its victims as an *imperial trust*, marked more by betrayal and hunger than by 'the material and moral well-being and the social progress of the inhabitants.' That black South Africans survived such Trust is more to be attributed to the irradicability of their ancestral roots in the soil of South Africa and the ability of the dispossessed to counter the theo-ganda of trusteeship and sustain a discourse and praxis of resistance than it is to the periodic efforts made between 1936 and 1990 to recast the T/trust in terms deemed by their authors to be more to 'the advantage of both sections'. The succession of names, from 'Native' to 'Bantu' to 'Development', was part of the dispossessive discourse of the Trust.

#### 4.2.2 Deconstructing the Trust of Hunger

An ancestral hermeneutic, reading from below, finds that the 'trust', like the land itself, was assumed; Europeans in South Africa were not *entrusted* with the land by black South Africans, they assumed the 'trust' as they had violently assumed the land - giving the lie to official terminology for legislation like the 'Native Trust and Land Act' of 1936. White 'trusteeship' was a self-interested patriarchy, and its 'guardianship' an oppressive charge. There was, in both the legal and societal senses, the *colour of trust*,<sup>57</sup> a *simulacrum* of trust lacking verity or substance - a mask, white, seeking to put a humanitarian face on the hunger which the dispossession occasioned. The proprietary invention of 'T/trust' is central to the white attempt to provide a justifying narrative for the dispossession of Africans from their ancestral land; it does not bear cursory scrutiny, let alone the more advanced degrees of interrogation it receives in land-less communities operating with a hermeneutic of suspicion born of bitter, lethal experience - a hermeneutic which is not blunted but sharpened by the memory of complex and often contradictory strategies of resistance and accommodation practised under colonialism and apartheid.

The Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 'released' land (an arrogant term, bespeaking the history of dispossession which lies behind it) to be added to the Reserves ('scheduled land') defined by the Land Act of 1913, and established the South African Native Trust to acquire

<sup>57</sup> 'Color' is defined in *Black's Law Dictionary* as, 'An appearance, semblance or *simulacrum*, as distinguished from that which is real. A prima facie or apparent right. Hence, a deceptive appearance; a plausible, assumed exterior, concealing a lack of reality; a disguise or pretext.' 'Colorable' is defined as 'That which is in appearance only, and not in reality, what it purports to be, hence counterfeit, feigned, having the appearance of truth.' The 'color of law' is defined as 'The appearance or semblance, without the substance, of legal right. *Misuse of power, possessed by virtue of state law and made possible only because wrongdoer is clothed with authority of state, is action taken under "color of law"*.' 'Color of title' is defined as 'The appearance, semblance or simulacrum of title ... but that which is not title in fact or in law. Also termed "apparent title".' *Black's Law Dictionary*, op. cit., pp.240-41.

and administer that land.<sup>58</sup> The Trust, which held final title to all land allocated for black settlement, was later renamed the South African Development Trust, adding the ambiguity of the term 'development' to the deceit of the term 'trust'.<sup>59</sup> The Trust legislated what came to be known as 'betterment schemes', which endure in the *memoria passionis* in much the same way as do the 'improvements' of the 18th and 19th centuries in the Scottish Highlands when viewed by their dispossessed victims, including the usurpation and/or corruption of the trust which inhered in the traditional chieftainship.<sup>60</sup> As part of the Native Trust, the 'betterment' provisions in the legislation concerned themselves with the use of 'Trust Land' at the local level, enforcing a three-fold demarcation of land into residential, grazing and ploughing zones, and seeking to control the number of cattle which members of rural communities could maintain on land allocated for grazing.

In her analysis of the 'Betterment Laws' associated with the Native Trust and Land Act, Mirjam van Donk highlights the linkage between dispossession and impoverishment, quoting a community member as saying, 'Today people remember the Trust as another law to make rural people poorer.'<sup>61</sup> In support of this assessment, she quotes John of Majuba, from the collection *Ibundela. Stories from the Transkei*, who speaks of 'The Trust of Hunger,' which drove younger generations from the land, leaving their elders in a state of both physical and familial poverty:

The trust brought hunger. Some people say it was The Trust of Hunger. Hunger brings sickness. The young don't eat well. These days you must buy food, but you haven't got any money and the young children become sick from lack of food.

Hunger makes men leave their villages to look for work in Johannesburg and other cities. There they find a nice place. They forget their homes and the hungry people they left behind. The Trust made the people want to travel and not to stay home. They aren't interested in their homes. They want to live in places where there is enough food to eat. Our sons are gone. They left their wives and children here and they are hungry.

This is the hunger of not ploughing. But it is also the hunger of living alone. Your

<sup>58</sup> The Native Trust and Land Act, 1936, 'released' 6.2 million hectares to be added to the land scheduled for the African 'reserves' described in the 1913 Native Land Act (which comprised 7.9% of the landmass). The *released* areas plus the *scheduled* areas meant that 13.7% of South Africa was now set aside as black reserves; hence the well-known statistics: 13.7% of the land for 87% of the population. The released areas were to be acquired for 'African occupation' and administered by the newly invented South African Native Trust. In the event the Trust failed to acquire all of the land designated as 'released' in the Act, leaving black South Africans with something approaching 13% of the land surface under apartheid.

<sup>59</sup> The Trust was also called the South African Bantu Trust for some time. Though there is a succession of terms - Native, Bantu, Black - for Africans in the legislation over the years, the term 'trust' does not change, indicating that whatever propagandistic considerations lay behind the periodic reviews of terminology, they did not occasion a review of the proprietary assumption of trust itself. The associated term 'Trust Land' refers to land acquired by the trust for African ownership and occupation.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Alexander MacKenzie, *History of the Highland Clearances*, Edinburgh, 1991 (1st edition, 1883).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Mirjam van Donk, *Land and the Church: The Case of the Dutch Reformed Churches*, Relevant Church Series, Western Province Council of Churches, No. 1, Cape Town, 1994a. p.9.

children leave because of the hardships and they don't stay to plough the land. Some children are confused by the drought and they don't know what to do. They don't know how to help their parents. They leave their homes and they do bad things, because they don't know how to make ends meet. We need the children. The children say they will find work in Johannesburg, Durban or Cape Town. But they don't write and they don't come home. You are separated from your child.

We are confused. There's nothing we can do. We can't make our homes better, because our children are all in the cities. There are only old men and women here and they can do nothing (in Van Donk 1994a: 11).

The linkage between the economic and relational aspects of John of Majuba's analysis is compellingly clear in his statement that the 'trust of hunger' involves both the hunger of not ploughing and the hunger of living alone: sons and daughters have gone to the cities, there is no-one to plough the land, and, fatally, 'old men and women can do nothing.' On the ground this hunger is experienced and interpreted as part of the T/trust: 'the Trust made the people want to travel and not stay home.'

Writing of the Native Trust and Land Act of 1936 in his autobiography, *Let My People Go*, Albert Luthuli, President of the ANC and Nobel Peace Laureate, declared that it 'merely consolidated the practices which had existed from 1913 onwards in one piece of legislation, confining us more effectively to our 13 per cent of South Africa's land surface.' As for the 'Trust', Luthuli is under no illusions:

The 'Trust' part of the Act gave the impression that the Government was intending to buy us more land to add to our crowded and agriculturally unsatisfactory 'reserves'. That was its declared purpose. Some land had been bought. It had taken successive Governments twenty-five years to acquire 70 per cent of the extra land then promised. Thus we still live on less than 13 per cent of South Africa's land; and the present Government is finding it acutely difficult to persuade white farmers to part with any more. If we had ever approved of the restrictions on our buying of land, or if we had ever placed reliance in white promises, we should by now, after twenty-five years, be sadly disillusioned. Fortunately not many of us had any illusions (Luthuli 1962: 85).

An illustration of the refusal of rural communities to trust in white promises comes from the struggle of the Bakwena to return to Mogopa. In the mid 1980s the government of PW Botha was engaged in a 'total strategy' which combined violent repression of resistance with a campaign to 'win hearts and minds' in the townships and rural communities. In rural areas, the cosmetic of apartheid with a human face included efforts to induce community members, usually working through their chiefs, or their legitimate chiefs' illegitimate successors, to agree to 'voluntary removals.' In Mogopa these inducements (promises of land in the resettlement area, for example) succeeded in drawing away the chief and a number of tenant families, with the majority of landholders in Mogopa resisting the 'voluntary removal.' Inducements quickly became intimidation, violent removal and nomadic exile from Mogopa.

By 1987, after three very difficult years in Bethanie, the people of Mogopa were desperate to return to their ancestral land. The Minister for Co-operation and Development (formerly Bantu Affairs), Dr Gerrit Viljoen, was cast in the role of 'good cop' with communities like Mogopa, presenting himself as their friend who was working hard for their welfare. Joseph Kgatitsoe recalls the state of play in the struggle to return to Mogopa in the autumn of 1987:

On the 12th of September, 1987, following the meeting at Wits University, we met Dr Viljoen in Pretoria and told him that we were going back to Mogopa whether the government liked it or not. The Mogopa delegation to that meeting was from both Johannesburg and Bethanie. That day Viljoen appealed to us not to go back to Mogopa under the present circumstances. Viljoen said he had a plan that we should move to a place called Onderstepoort, near Rustenburg. So it was available. His plan was that we should stay there temporarily, for three months, while he consulted the cabinet of PW Botha to see if the government would allow us to go back to Mogopa.<sup>62</sup>

The community did move to Onderstepoort, largely because life had been made very difficult for them at Bethanie, and because the move to Onderstepoort involved no compromise of their goal of returning to Mogopa. Predictably, Viljoen's efforts to convince the Botha Cabinet to allow the Bakwena to return to Mogopa were not successful. Lucas Kgatitsoe, operating with no illusions, had already told Viljoen at the September meeting in Pretoria that he didn't trust Viljoen to represent the case of Mogopa with any vigour, for he had been part of the government which had taken their land and forcibly removed the Bakwena in 1983/84. Accordingly, Lucas Kgatitsoe thought the people of Mogopa should make their own representation to the Cabinet. This was a second-order strategy which in no way compromised the basic commitment of the Bakwena to return to Mogopa 'whether the government liked it or not' - which, in the event, is what happened:

After the community agreed to move to Onderstepoort, Viljoen visited to see that we were given all the amenities we needed. At that time he warned us not to allow other people to move to Onderstepoort to swell the numbers. Only Mogopa people were to live there. No renting of backyards to tenants. At that time I was struck by a stroke. But I understand that Viljoen subsequently had to inform the Mogopa people at Onderstepoort that the cabinet had *refused* to allow the people to return to Mogopa. Some months before this, before my stroke, I had told Viljoen, '*You took our title by force! You are the one who removed us! How can I trust you to get our title back! I don't believe you! Rather it should be me, I should present our case in cabinet! Not you!*' That was at the meeting in Pretoria in September, 1987.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>62</sup> Onderstepoort was available because the community for which it had been designated as a resettlement area, the Bakubung at Mathopestad, had successfully resisted their removal. The Bakubung ba Ratheo (Monnakgotla) at Molotestad were not as fortunate and were violently removed, as discussed above in the introduction and in chapter three.

<sup>63</sup> Interview with the Mogopa Vanguard, op. cit., p.10.



The related themes of false trust and hunger raise the question of fiduciary capacity. In his discussion of MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Duncan Forrester makes a searching linkage between questions of justice, rationality and trust, 'There are in fact competing and contradictory understandings of rationality and of justice, resting on fiduciary foundations which are now rarely examined and whose importance is frequently denied' (Forrester 1989: 5). Trust may not be assumed, or coerced, and still retain its fiduciary integrity or its legislative legitimacy. There is no sense in which, having employed force and fraud, Europeans in South Africa can be said to have had a fiduciary capacity with respect to the land from which they had dispossessed Africans. Their 'T/trust' was established *in mala fides* and with the exercise of undue influence. A fiduciary relationship, which requires of the fiduciary an unmitigated commitment to the interests of the other, cannot exist where the trust has been invented, the relationship imposed, and the interests of the 'beneficiaries' betrayed. Thus, false fathers established a false trust, experienced as hunger by its 'beneficiaries'. The trust was violently assumed and unilaterally legislated; there cannot, incidental and individual acts of charity within the intimate setting of farm-life notwithstanding, be said to have been a fiduciary relationship.

#### 4.2.3 Restoring Trust Toward Prosperity

In marked contrast to the imperial and paternalistic assumption of trust in the colonial period and the further theological and political manipulation of that T/trust under apartheid, the Bakwena Community established its own Trust following its return to Mogopa and the subsequent promise of the Minister of Regional and Land Affairs to restore its legal title to the first of its two farms, Swartrand.<sup>64</sup> The objectives of the *Bakwena Ba Mogopa Trust*, set up with the assistance of its lawyers,<sup>65</sup> are defined by its *Deed of Trust* as follows:

<sup>64</sup> While the then Minister, Scheepers, promised the return of the title deed for Swartrand in July, 1992, it was not until 1994 that the title was actually transferred back to the Mogopa Community, an all-too typical scenario wherein rural communities, their right to title established and recognised, were made to wait for months, then years, during the early stages of the transition period for government structures to deliver on their decisions and promises. It is this kind of experience which lies behind the 'patience statement' in the June 25, 1993 *Memorandum of the Back to the Land Communities*: 'The rural people of our land are known for their patience. However, our patience is not endless. If the negotiators do not address at least the minimum demand of restoration urgently, the only course of action left to our communities is to return to our land' (see above, chapter two).

<sup>65</sup> The Mogopa Community has benefited greatly from the dedicated and skilful legal work of the firm Tilde, Thompson and Haysom, represented by Nicholas Haysom and Brendan Barry, and that of Aninka Claassens, a friend of the community and until recently the Senior Research Officer of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) of the University of the Witwatersrand. Nicholas Haysom is named as 'The Founder' in the Deed of Trust and is one of the Trustees, as is Aninka Claassens.

1. to utilise its resources in ways which, in the opinion of its Trustees, would develop the quality of life of the beneficiaries of the Trust and promote the return of all the land from which the Bakwena Ba Mogopa were forcibly removed;
2. to acquire ownership of the farms Swartrand 145 IP and Hartebeeslaagte 146 IP in the district of Ventersdorp and to hold such ownership on behalf of the beneficiaries of the Trust;
3. to do all things necessary to further the above and ancillary objectives.<sup>66</sup>

The nature of the T/trust involved is both formal and relational. With respect to formal trust, the *Deed of Trust* states that the Trust 'is to serve as an appropriate fund and institution for the mobilisation of funds and the carrying out of projects and activities required to facilitate the meeting of the objectives of the Trust,' and that "'Trust" shall mean the Trust created under this Deed of Trust.' With respect to relational T/trust, the *Deed of Trust* stipulates that:

A Trustee shall, in the performance of his/her duties and in the exercise of his/her power act with the care, diligence and skill which can reasonably be expected of a person who manages the affairs of another; No Trustee shall be liable for any loss of the Trust ... except such as is occasioned by such Trustee's own personal, wilful act of dishonesty ... Nothing herein contained shall be deemed to exempt a Trustee from or indemnify him/her against liability for breach of trust where he/she failed to show the degree of care, diligence and skill referred to above.<sup>67</sup>

The Trustees are accountable to the beneficiaries of the T/trust (defined as the members of the Bakwena Ba Mogopa Community as determined by the Constitution of the Bakwena Ba Mogopa) for both aspects of the T/trust so established, particularly with respect to the land and all funds held in trust. Trustees are to hold office for four years only, and new Trustees are to be chosen by majority resolution of the beneficiaries of the Trust sitting in General Meeting. To begin the rotation of community members into and out of Trusteeship, there is a further provision that 50% of the first Trustees are to resign after two years in office. An annual audit and financial statement, and the application of the Trust Property Control Act further define the accountability of the Trustees to the beneficiaries of the Trust. Given the history of dispossession of the Mogopa Community, it is not surprising that specific stipulations are written into the Deed of Trust limiting the power of the Trustees with respect to the land of the Bakwena Ba Mogopa:

The Trustees shall not have the power to enter into any transactions of a patently speculative nature in relation to property, (or) to alienate ownership of the farms Swartrand 145 IP and Hartebeeslaagte 146 IP, without the prior majority resolution of the beneficiaries sitting in General Meeting authorising them to do so.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> *Bakwena Ba Mogopa Deed of Trust*, 1994, p.5.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, pp.2-4,14-15. The *Deed of Trust* names the following members of the Mogopa Community as trustees: Jacob Mpshe, Lucas Kgatitsoe, Johannes More, Pudinyane Molefe, Mary Tlhapi, and Joseph Kgatitsoe.

<sup>68</sup> *ibid.*, p.11.

Together with the Constitution of the Bakwena Ba Mogopa, the *Deed of Trust* establishes a community T/trust which seeks to be a democratic, gender-inclusive and accountable response to both the imperial 'trust' of the colonial and apartheid eras and the compromised trust of a corrupt and co-opted chieftainship.<sup>69</sup> However, the T/trust is already under the *de facto* challenge represented by a small group of men who wish to reassert their patriarchal, economic and political power in the community. It is clear that if the new T/trust is to reverse the downward spiral of dispossession and poverty, the return of the land is not enough; there must be an disciplined, inclusive and mutually-accountable democratic process coupled with a sustained and manifest commitment to the traditional values of *ubuntu-botho* in the restoration of life on the land.

### 4.3 Beyond the Conflict of Patriarchies

As stated at the outset, this discussion of the conflict of patriarchies in ancestral land claims has as its goal not the further entrenchment of the lines and lineages of battle but the documentation of a critically inclusive vision of rural communities, beyond the conflict of patriarchies, as they return to their land. The communities in the Back to the Land Campaign critique the exclusivity of the white regime on the land in South Africa not from a counter-exclusionary consciousness but from an inclusive tradition and vision marked by prophetic criticality, grace and pragmatism. This 'prophetic pragmatism' is subversive of the old and enabling of the new: its grace is subversive of the divisive legacy of apartheid on the land, inviting convergence and community; and its pragmatism is subversive of the impoverishing legacy of apartheid on the land, inviting co-operation in uprooting poverty, towards prosperity for all who work the land. The vision of the communities moves beyond the conflict of patriarchies in at least two ways: 1) beyond white exclusivity *versus* black inclusivity, to a vision of sharing the land, involving a move beyond competition towards co-operation and the

<sup>69</sup> The forced removal of the Bakwena ba Mogopa occurred, as discussed above, with the complicity of the chief, Jacob More, following the justifiable efforts of the community to call him to account for the community funds entrusted to him, his failure to do so, and the subsequent action of the community to suspend him as chief. See interview with Lucas Kgatitsoe, Soweto, 23 August, 1994. See also the evidence presented to the Commission on Land Allocation concerning the second of Mogopa's farms, Hartebeeslaagte, at the Public Hearing held in Pretoria on 22 May, 1993. In his report on the hearing, Pete Moatshe of the Covenant Project of the SACC quotes Matthews Kgatitsoe as testifying that: 'In 1984 Jacob More came to Mogopa and destroyed the water pumps. Diesel was put in water dams to pollute water. This Chief also took all the money belonging to the community. When the community asked why this man was allowed to do these things, the magistrate explained that he could rule until he died. On 14 February 1984 police and soldiers surrounded Mogopa at midnight, arrested people and forcefully removed them. The struggle then continued from Pachsdraai to Bethanie to Onderstepoort, and then back to Mogopa' (in Moatshe 1993: 2).

restoration of T/trust on the ground in local rdp/RDP<sup>70</sup> initiatives, with the goal of uprooting poverty and moving towards a shared prosperity; and 2) beyond patriarchy itself, recognising the rights of women to own and work the land, and participate with equality in all decision-making bodies concerning land allocation and use, and the distribution of the wealth realised from the land. We turn now to a consideration of the first of these, leaving the womanist critique of patriarchy and the praxis of gender-inclusivity on the land to chapter seven.

The conflict of patriarchies may not be read apart from the discourse, both prophetic and redemptive, of the TLRC communities concerning exclusivity and inclusivity with respect to black and white on the land. As has been seen above, the discourse of the communities condemns the commodification (dispossession, demarcation, deeds-as-receipt) of the land and the exclusionary practice (racial and economic) of whites on the land, and at the same time asserts an critically inclusive vision of black and white sharing the land and working it to their mutual benefit.

In the Moletele interview, for example, the exclusivity of whites is identified as the central problem: 'The problem is just there. They don't want to share the land. They say it must be them alone. Them only. It is this "only" that is their big mistake.' Yet this does not lead to, nor does it arise from, a corresponding counter-exclusivity on the part of the Moletele. Barnas Mashego's statement, 'They don't want to share the land,' is grounded both in his experience of the violent exclusivity of white hegemony over the land and in his African communal tradition, a deep and primary grounding which has not been eradicated by the forced removals which his people have suffered. The question of a critical willingness to *share the land* with the *other* is one of the key points upon which the land question pivots, crucial both in assessing the historical aspects of land restitution and in thinking about a future life on the land for everyone in an inclusive vision of the new South Africa. The inclusivity of the Moletele vision in the face of the dispossessive exclusivity of the white vision and practice of apartheid is truly remarkable and a source of hope for a new South Africa. A categorical rejection of the claim that South Africa is '*Die Vaderland*' does not mean a categorical rejection of the Boers who make that claim. Bright Mashego, calling for more specificity in the

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<sup>70</sup> The term rdp/RDP is chosen to represent the priority of local involvement in reconstruction and development programmes. More than being 'people-driven', rdp/RDP initiatives must be 'people-designed' and 'people-built.' That is, the rdp/RDP process must be more than merely inclusive of local voices; local communities, having endured the poverty, must be involved from the beginning in initiatives aimed at reversing the downward spiral of dispossession and impoverishment towards prosperity on the land. The rhetoric of the RDP runs the risk of becoming a disempowering discourse wherein the language of reconstruction and development is correct from the point of view of RDP professionals but foreign to the experience of people on the ground.



position of the Boers, grants that the Boers are South Africans by birth and in that sense South Africa may be said to be their fatherland. It is a statement of grace on Mashego's part - an enabling grace which should not be mistaken for weakness or internalised oppression. For, as Mashego himself asserts, it is when whites try to 'separate this "fatherland" as their own, as being theirs alone' that they identify with the ideology of apartheid and must be resisted. Using the contrastive conjunction *empa* (but), the point of reversal in his speech, Bright Mashego asserts a different vision, an inclusive interpretation of black and white on the land: 'But it is their 'fatherland' jointly with us! We are one thing together. They shouldn't separate this 'fatherland' as their own - as being theirs alone. We are both fatherlanders in this land.'

There is, it must be admitted, a scandalous quality to Bright Mashego's grace. Many would want to ask him how he could make a statement like, 'We are one thing together ... we are both fatherlanders in this land'. Is his inclusivity sufficiently suspicious, sufficiently critical? Is it not a vision that blunts the struggle for land restitution? It is the same sense of scandal which many feel with respect to President Mandela's critical willingness to negotiate with his former oppressors as fellow South Africans.<sup>71</sup> It is the scandal of grace, and herein lies hope. But the grace is not cheap, nor is the hope blind. In the words of Desmond Tutu, writing in 1980:

In the body of this paper I have described many things that have happened to us Blacks in this country during the several decades of our oppression and exploitation and deprivation [under-nourishment and starvation ... a 'false economy of malnutrition'... psychological trauma as a result of uprooting, enforced removal ... ]. It is, I believe, a miracle of God's grace that Blacks still talk to Whites, to any Whites. It is a miracle of God's grace that Blacks still say we want a non-racial South Africa for all of us, Black and White together. It is a miracle of God's grace that Blacks can still say they are committed to a ministry of justice and reconciliation and that they want to avert the blood-bath which seems more and more inevitable as we see little bending and give on the crucial issue of power-sharing. We are told that the Afrikaners have found it very difficult to forgive, certainly difficult to forget what the British did to them in the concentration camps. I want to say that Blacks are going to find it very difficult to forgive, certainly difficult to forget what Whites have done and are doing to us in this matter of population removals (Tutu 1980 in 1983: 54).

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Nelson Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom - The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, Randburg, 1994; Heribert Adam and Kogila Moodley, *The Negotiated Revolution: Society and Politics in Post-Apartheid South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1993; Allister Sparks, *Tomorrow is Another Country: The Inside Story of South Africa's Negotiated Revolution*, Johannesburg, 1994; Desmond Tutu, *The Rainbow People of God: South Africa's Victory Over Apartheid*, edited by John Allen, London, 1994. That a pragmatic necessity compelled both Mandela and De Klerk, both the ANC and the NP, to negotiate, has been argued convincingly in Adam and Moodley; it is also clear, however, that the pragmatism was also prophetic morally, the scandalous but not cheap grace discussed by Tutu and evident in Mandela's strategy and style throughout, and in his Inaugural Speech as State President, 10 May 1994.

Bright Mashego's own statement is both an unequivocal rejection of apartheid: 'They shouldn't *separate* this fatherland as their own,' and a scandalously gracious assertion of an inclusive vision: '*We are both* fatherlanders in this land.' The grace involved is both subversive of the old and enabling of the new: a land wherein all may live and which may be worked toward the prosperity of all. The praxiological aspects of this vision are indispensable to its success: the grace, subversive and enabling, is married to a pragmatism which is rooted in the history of surviving in a semi-arid land in the face of the incursive military and cultural force of false European fathers and their descendants in Africa. Black farmers are saying both that they want their land back and that they want to farm it in peace, and if possible in co-operation, with their white counterparts. Willis Ngobe's acknowledgement of what he has learned from white farmers, coupled with his sharp rejection of the dispossessive exclusivity of apartheid and his demand for good land (with 'long soils' which hold rain, and not the 'sandy soils' to which his people had been consigned under apartheid - whites having taken the long soils for themselves) to farm 'properly,' is an eloquent summary of the position.

At the same time, the 'bottom line' of Archbishop Ngada that Africa is for 'aboriginal' Africans over 'naturalised' Africans, and the searching observation of Rev Kenosi Mofokeng that it has been white South Africans themselves who, rejecting an African identity, have gone out of their way to perpetuate a European identity in Africa and who have been so violently exclusive in its defence, must be remembered in any effort to get beyond the conflict of patriarchies. Again, the need to employ both a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of affirmation is underlined. Given the critical willingness of black South Africans to share the land with white South Africans, there is a sense in which the onus is indeed on white South Africans to enter into the inclusivity of this vision. As Archbishop Ngada states so succinctly: 'It's up to them now.' How this plays itself out with respect to the conceptualisation and praxis of land restitution and community restoration at the local level will be pursued in the final chapter. With respect to T/trust, adapting Klippies Kritzinger's statement concerning common ground, we may say: we will not find grounds for T/trust until everyone has some ground.

## CHAPTER 5

# Biblical Hermeneutics in Local Struggles for Land Restitution I: Criticality and Relationality

When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us: 'Let us pray.' After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.

South African Saying

Now the question is: black people have chosen to use the Bible and Christianity to get the land back; but can they get the land back and keep the Bible and Christianity?

Itumeleng Mosala<sup>1</sup>

We read the bible passages as they are ... And I think that's how - that is the approach, the framework of how we approach our theology ... So, we follow the bible as it is. I don't know how to call that, because it will happen to put [our approach into] categories.

Archbishop N.H. Ngada, ASCA<sup>2</sup>

The role of the bible with respect to land in South Africa has been one of significant ambiguity: divergent interpretations and appropriations of biblical texts by dispossessors and dispossessed alike have played a major role in the material and representational struggles for land and life in successive phases of conquest, settlement and relocation.<sup>3</sup> Eurocentric interpretations and appropriations of biblical texts and traditions have, since the arrival of the

<sup>1</sup> Itumeleng Mosala, 'Prospects for the Future and Building of Alliances,' in Simon Maimela and Dwight Hopkins, eds., *We are One Voice: Black Theology in the USA and South Africa*, Braamfontein, 1989, p.148.

<sup>2</sup> See the Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, African Spiritual Churches Association, Braamfontein, unpublished, 27 September, 1994, pp.15-16.

<sup>3</sup> See the discussion in John De Gruchy, 'Theologies in Conflict: the South African Debate,' in Charles Villavencio and John De Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naudé*, Cape Town, 1985, pp.85-97. De Gruchy, writing more than a decade ago, argues that there have been at least three reasons why theology in South Africa has been a matter of social consequence and not indifference: 'the all-pervasive role which the Christian church has played and continues to fulfil within society; the fact that since European colonisation commenced in the seventeenth century conflicting socio-political and economic interests have been sanctioned by religious conviction; and the significant though ambivalent role which Christians and churches play in the struggle both for and against apartheid today' (1985: 85). The conflict of interpretations with respect to biblical texts and traditions may be seen to have been part of all three reasons cited by De Gruchy. Beyond his 'at least' three reasons, the integral worldview of black South Africans has meant, as discussed above, that struggles for the land in South Africa have conjoined socio-economic, political, historical-legal with religio-cultural analyses in a multivalent integrality that is at once material and spiritual, and that thus adds to our awareness of why theology and biblical hermeneutics have been of social consequence and not indifference in South Africa.

bible in South Africa in the 17th century,<sup>4</sup> been marked by a blurring of the distinction between eisegesis and exegesis, with both, whatever the disinterested pretensions of the latter, showing themselves to be subject to the socio-economic, political, and religio-cultural locations and interests of their settler/colonial practitioners. Conversely, as the bible was translated into African languages and read by black South Africans through their own eyes, the discursive power of white theological hermeneutics in South Africa began to be subverted by Afrocentric readings of the same corpus of texts. This chapter presents and examines the historical and interpretive context of the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. Throughout, we will be dealing primarily with what we may call *grounded biblical hermeneutics*, a term which locates the hermeneutics 'on the ground' in the communities and signals the importance of local interpreters and contexts in a biblical hermeneutics of land restitution. The chapter begins with a consideration of the historical and methodological interpretive crises that have faced biblical hermeneutics in South Africa, and moves towards a grounded statement of a relational, liberative and transformative biblical hermeneutics. Following a brief consideration of the critical convergence of liberative traditions (Black, African, Prophetic and Womanist) in local biblical hermeneutics with respect to land restitution, the chapter moves on to a consideration of introductory cases. Participative relationality is identified as the primary dynamic in the hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, and the concept of *relational hermeneutical pathways* is introduced - specifically those of shared suffering, struggle and celebration. Read together with the chapter which follows, this chapter is concerned not only to address the evaluative question of whether and to what extent biblical hermeneutics on the ground is liberative and transformative in local struggles for ancestral land, but also to address the methodological question of *how* it is so, and what it has to teach us.

<sup>4</sup> The date of the arrival of Jan van Riebeeck, 6 April 1652, serves as a general date for the arrival of the bible in what became the Cape Colony. It is possible to argue that the bible may have 'arrived' earlier, by shipwreck for example, or on one of the infrequent landings of Portuguese sailors at the end of the fifteenth century. While the landfalls of Portuguese explorers (Bartholomew Dias in 1487-88, and Vasco da Gama in 1497-98) cannot be said to have introduced the bible to the Cape, they did result in the erection of stone crosses (*padrão*) on the land, signalling the nationalistic and proprietary approach to both cross and land in the 'age of exploration.' The concomitance of exploitation and evangelism was formalised in the *padroado* (Spanish *patronato*) agreement declared by Pope Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia), who, in 1493, drew a line through the Atlantic (shifted 370 leagues to the west in 1494) and 'donated' the 'new' world to the kings of Portugal and Spain, in exchange for their commitment to Christian mission among its inhabitants - a mission over which the kings were careful to gain control in the arrangement. In December 1487 Dias erected a *padrão* on the Cape Peninsula, and a second at Kwaihoek, on the Great Fish River, early in 1488. Six years earlier Diogo Cão, sailing for King John II of Portugal, had erected stone crosses along the west coast of Africa, as far south as Cape Cross. The inscriptions on the stone crosses in the holds of his ships stated how King John II had ordered Diogo Cão to discover these lands 'in the year 6681 of the creation of the world and 1482 of the birth of our Lord Jesus' (Colin McCredy 1995:70). Thus the name of Jesus is transferred from the holds of Portuguese ships and, together with the names of a Portuguese King and his navigator, erected in stone over the soil of Africa.



### 5.1 *The Bible and the Land: Historical and Interpretive Crises*

Gerald West in his analysis of the biblical hermeneutics of liberation in South Africa has identified two ‘related interpretive crises’: an historical crisis, wherein the focus is on the role of the bible in South African history ‘as both an instrument of social control and an instrument of social struggle’; and a methodological crisis, wherein the focus is on ‘biblical interpretation and the bible itself as both a problem and a solution’ (West, 1991:35). Following West’s distinction, it may be said that this section of the chapter will deal with the methodological crisis in the context of the historical crisis. Our point of departure for a consideration of the *historical* crisis concerning the bible and land in South Africa will be what Takatso Mofokeng has called the ‘incomprehensible paradox’ that an instrument of oppression has also become an instrument of liberation in the hands of the oppressed (Mofokeng 1988). Our point of departure for a consideration of the *methodological* interpretive crisis will be Itumeleng Mosala’s ideological critique of the concept of the bible as the ‘Word of God’ (1986, 1989), which he sees as an ‘ideological manoeuvre’ on the part of the ruling classes designed to place the bible, an instrument of oppression in their hands, above criticism. Widening the debate to include the work of Barney Pityana (1994), John Parratt (1989), Josiah Young (1992, 1993), Wolfram Kistner (1993), Sandra Schneiders (1989), John De Gruchy (1991) and Gerald West (1991, 1992), the argument addresses the need for an ideological critique of both biblical text and interpreter from a grounded point of view, in which the suspicions, affirmations and interpretations of ‘ordinary readers’ (G. West 1991) predominate. The biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities is introduced as one in which the primary dynamic is that of participative relationality, in which the reciprocal liberative and transformative capacity of both the interpreters and the biblical texts they interpret is realised through a critical and creative engagement, following what are identified as the relational hermeneutical pathways of suffering, struggle and celebration. The relational hermeneutics of the TLRC communities will be seen to participate in the Word of God as liberative and transformative event.

#### 5.1.1 Addressing Takatso Mofokeng’s ‘Incomprehensible Paradox’

It is not for nothing that the saying has gained widespread currency in South Africa that: ‘when the whites came to Africa they had the bibles and we had the land; now we have the bibles and they have the land.’ This is sometimes accompanied in the telling by a second saying: ‘the whites taught us to pray with our eyes closed; while our eyes were closed they ran

their flag up the pole and took our land.<sup>5</sup> Using these sayings as a point of departure for a black reading of the history of the bible in South Africa to the late 1980s, Takatso Mofokeng argues for a decolonisation of consciousness through the exposure and deconstruction of oppressive biblical hermeneutics *en route* to a termination of human exploitation:

No statement in the history of political science as well as that of Christian missions expresses the dilemma that confronts black South Africans in their relationships with the Bible with greater precision and has whipped up more emotions than the following: 'When the white man came to our country he had the Bible and we had the land. The white man said to us: "Let us pray." After the prayer, the white man had the land and we had the Bible.' With this statement which is known by young and old in South Africa, black people point to three dialectically related realities. They show the central position which the Bible occupies in the ongoing process of colonisation, national oppression and exploitation. They also confess the *incomprehensible paradox* of being colonised by a Christian people and yet being converted to their religion and accepting the Bible, their ideological instrument of colonisation, oppression and exploitation. Thirdly, they express a historic commitment that is accepted solemnly by one generation and passed on to another: a commitment to terminate exploitation of humans by other humans (Mofokeng 1988: 34, italics mine).

Takatso Mofokeng's 'incomprehensible paradox' - that the 'ideological instrument of colonisation, exploitation and oppression,' through which a culture of obedience to those who held the keys to the new discursive power was inculcated and through which oppression was internalised, could also become an instrument of empowerment and liberation of the colonised, exploited and oppressed - is a central issue in the role of the bible in local struggles for land restitution. Mofokeng may be over-estimating the degree of incomprehensibility, however. The paradox may be susceptible of comprehension in the light of biblical hermeneutics practised on the ground within the TLRC communities.

Ambiguities notwithstanding, it may not be denied that the bible in the hands of landless Black South Africans, translated/interpreted into their mother tongues, however imperfectly, by early missionaries (Setiloane 1972, 1986), has become an enabling source of moral critique and spiritual empowerment (Boesak 1977; Kairos Theologians 1986; Motlhabi, ed., 1972; SACC 1984; Tutu 1982). The bible has been employed effectively, in part in spite of itself (Mosala 1986, 1989) and certainly in spite of the oppressive uses to which it has been put in the service of various white dispossessive discourses (Villa-Vincencio and De Gruchy, eds., 1983), as a cultural weapon in the deconstruction of theological-political rationales elaborated by colonial and apartheid regimes. For example, the response of

<sup>5</sup> These sayings have been widely reported in the literature, and were indeed cited at various times in the TLRC communities in response to questions concerning the bible in general, and specific biblical texts and traditions that the communities have found helpful in their struggles. See the discussion in Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Cluster Publications Monograph Series Number 1, Pietermaritzburg, 1991, p.34ff.

Desmond Tutu to the Eloff Commission in September of 1982, which had accused the SACC of supporting 'left-radical liberation politics,' has gone down in the annals of South Africa's 'theological civil war' (Sparks, 1990) as a decisive hour wherein the oppressive appropriation of the bible by the apartheid regime was exposed, and the case for the bible as 'the most radical book there is' and for liberation hermeneutics as 'The Divine Imperative' is made with uncompromising rigour:

I will demonstrate that apartheid, separate development, or whatever it is called is evil, totally and without remainder, that it is unchristian and unbiblical. If anyone were to show me otherwise, I would burn my Bible and cease to be a Christian ...

God takes sides with the poor, the weak, the oppressed, the widow, the orphan and the alien. That is a refrain you get in the book of Deuteronomy - look after these because they represent a class in society which tends to be marginalised, to be pushed to the periphery, the bottom of the pile, the end of the queue. God can't help it. He always takes sides. He is no neutral God. He takes the side of the weak and the oppressed. I am not saying so. I have shown it to be so in the Bible.

Where there is injustice, exploitation and oppression then the Bible and the God of the Bible are subversive of such a situation ... The Bible is the most revolutionary, the most radical book there is. If any book should be banned by those who rule unjustly and as tyrants, then it is the Bible. Whites brought us the Bible and we are taking it seriously.

We are involved with God to set us free from all that enslaves us and makes us less than what God intended us to be (Tutu 1994: 56,72).

Three years later, during which time apartheid had been declared a heresy,<sup>6</sup> and the bible had indeed been identified as a potentially subversive book by the South African Police and the South African Defence Force,<sup>7</sup> the Kairos Theologians, following a broadly-based consultative methodology, published their landmark *Challenge to the Church: A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa - the Kairos Document* (1985). Confronting, critiquing and countering the oppressive use of the bible by the apartheid state, and an ambiguous use of the bible by an insufficiently-committed church, the Kairos Theologians identified a liberative tradition/canon within the bible and employed a prophetic hermeneutics

<sup>6</sup> Cf. John De Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vincencio, eds., *Apartheid is a Heresy*, Cape Town, 1983. It was the General Assembly of WARC, meeting in Ottawa in 1982, that gave profile to the judgement, already made in South Africa, that 'racism is a sin, apartheid is a heresy.'

<sup>7</sup> Frank Chikane, for example, relates the story of how, during one of his periods of detention (without trial) in prison he was denied a bible because, as the officer in charge put it, 'The Bible makes a terrorist of you!' - a classic articulation of the ideological suspicion inherent in the securocratic consciousness (reported in De Gruchy, 1991:47). The security establishment, while refusing a political detainee access to a bible, was not reticent in using the bible in its own theo-ganda efforts. John de Gruchy examines the telling case of the parastatal Armscor's sponsorship of a programme for the distribution of bibles among soldiers at the height of South Africa's militarisation under P.W. Botha in the late 1980s. De Gruchy attributes this variously to 'a very spiritualised understanding of the message of the bible as one that could help soldiers face death on the battlefield with greater assurance of life after death, an understanding that the biblical message requires uncritical loyalty and obedience to the state, and a desire to promote a public image of Christian legitimacy for the manufacture of armaments. It was certainly not based on an understanding of the liberating, prophetic and transforming Word that confronts us in Scripture' (De Gruchy, 1991:75-76).

which denounced injustice and championed the struggle of the oppressed in the name of the biblical God.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the call to 'return to the bible' is one of the most remarkable features of the document. 'To be truly prophetic our response would have to be, in the first place, solidly grounded in the bible. Our KAIROS impels us to return to the bible and to search the Word of God for a message that is relevant to what we are experiencing in South Africa today' (Kairos Document 1986: 17). With respect to the methodological question of how that search might be conducted, the second edition emphasises the *significance of the experience of suffering and oppression for a prophetic hermeneutics*. In so doing it identifies one of the relational hermeneutical pathways, suffering, of a grounded biblical hermeneutics of liberation and transformation. Further, the passage makes an important linkage, missing in the first edition, between and among Black, African and African Independent theologies:

Black Theology, African Theology and the theology of the African Independent churches have already laid great emphasis upon the biblical teaching about suffering, especially the suffering of Jesus Christ. When we read the Bible from the point of view of our daily experiences of suffering and oppression, then what stands out for us is the many, many vivid and concrete descriptions of suffering and oppression throughout the Bible culminating in the cross of Jesus Christ.

For most of their history from Exodus to Revelation, the people of the bible suffered under one kind of oppression or another (Kairos Document 1986: 4.2).

It is essential to foreground the relationality involved in a hermeneutics that reads biblical narratives of suffering and oppression through the eyes of 'our daily experiences of suffering and oppression,' for, as noted above, shared suffering functions as a relational hermeneutical pathway in a grounded biblical hermeneutics of land restitution and transformation. As such, suffering may be seen as one of the keys to understanding how the bible is 'turned around' from instrument of dispossession to instrument of restitution, and thus how the 'incomprehensible paradox' may be rendered comprehensible.

Suffering as a relational pathway of a grounded hermeneutics was again identified with compelling clarity in *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion* (1989), an international sequel to the *Kairos Document*:

Gradually our experience of poverty and oppression began to raise questions for us: Why does God allow us to suffer so much? Why does God always side with the rich and the powerful? Some of us began to see that these questions were also raised in the psalms and in the book of Job who refused to accept any easy answers. Was poverty and oppression really the will of God?

<sup>8</sup> See section 4.2, for example: 'Throughout the Bible God appears as the liberator of the oppressed. God is not neutral. God does not attempt to reconcile Moses and Pharaoh, to reconcile the Hebrew slaves with their Egyptian oppressors ... Oppression is a sin and it cannot be compromised with, it must be done away with. God takes sides with the oppressed. As we read in Psalm 103:6, 'God, who does what is right, is always on the side of the oppressed' (Kairos Theologians 1985: 4.2).



... After many years of protest and pleading we began to take responsibility for our own liberation. We began to organise ourselves and became a people, the subjects of our own history ...

The Christians who were part of this development began to read the bible with new eyes. We were no longer dependent upon the interpretations of our oppressors.

What we discovered was that Jesus was one of us. He was born in poverty. He did not become incarnate as a king or nobleman but as one of the poor and oppressed. He took sides with the poor, supported their cause and blessed them ...

At the heart of Jesus' message was the coming of the Reign of God. We discovered that Jesus had promised the Reign of God to the poor ...

The Reign of God is not simply a way of speaking about the next world. The Reign of God is this world completely transformed in accordance with God's plan. It is like the Jubilee year of Leviticus 25 when all those who are living in slavery will be set free, when all debts will be cancelled and when the land will be restored to those from whom it was stolen. The Reign of God begins in this life but stretches out beyond this life. It is transcendent and eschatological without being unconcerned about the problems and suffering of the poor in this life.<sup>9</sup>

The hermeneutical and praxiological linkages made in the *Road to Damascus* between the suffering of the poor and the suffering of God, and between their shared suffering and the transcendent yet transformative Reign of God in history, comprise an essential and generative correlation in the biblical hermeneutics of the TLPC communities. Relational hermeneutical pathways shared by those who suffer oppression, dispossession and poverty have played a key role in what has been called the *epistemologica ruptura* (Sobrino 1984) in theologies 'from the underside of history.' *Suffering as a hermeneutical pathway is seen to relate the suffering of the poor in history to the suffering of God, a relational hermeneutical connection which may be said to be formative for theologies of the poor everywhere.* Jon Sobrino, writing of the Latin American context, identifies suffering as playing 'an active role in understanding', and as leading to the 'epistemological break' effected by the church of the poor. Tracing the hermeneutical linkages effected by this *via passionis* through the bible, Sobrino binds

<sup>9</sup> Institute for Contextual Theology, *The Road to Damascus: Kairos and Conversion*, Johannesburg, 1989, pp.7-8 (sections 33-38). The consultative process which led to the *Road to Damascus* involved participants from Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Namibia, South Africa, South Korea and the Philippines: 'Hundreds of Christians have been involved in the preparation of this document, and thousands of us have chosen to sign it. Extensive research and consultation within each of our countries and weeks of dialogue between representatives from the seven countries were conducted over a period of two and a half years. The results of this work are presented here as a proclamation of faith and a call to conversion.' The Preamble identifies the authors ('who we are'), what brought them together, and forecasts their findings: 'We are Christians from different church traditions in seven different nations ... What we have in common is not only a situation of violent political conflict, but also the phenomenon of Christians on both sides of the conflict. This is accompanied by the development of a Christian theology that sides with the poor and oppressed and the development of a Christian theology that sides with the oppressor. This is both a scandal and a crisis that challenges the Christian people of our countries ... The purpose of this document is not simply to deplore the divisions among Christians or to exhort both sides to seek unity. We wish to lay bare the historical and political roots of the conflict (Chapter 1), to affirm the faith of the poor and the oppressed Christians in our countries (Chapter 2), to condemn the sins of those who oppress, exploit, persecute and kill people (Chapter 3), and to call to conversion those who have strayed from the truth of Christian faith and commitment (Chapter 4).'

interpreter and text in an embrace authored by shared suffering, and issuing in the praxis of liberation:

In Latin America, the suffering ... of the present plays the active role in the process of understanding. Moreover, this suffering provides the authentic analogy for understanding God: the recognition that the present history of the world is the ongoing history of the suffering of God. At the crowning moments of divine revelation there has always been suffering: the cry of the oppressed in Egypt; the cry of Jesus on the cross; the birth-pangs experienced by the whole of creation as it awaits liberation. Latin American theology gives a privileged place to the cries of the oppressed. They are a stimulus to theological thinking. This does not mean that Latin American theology fails to deal with the positive themes of theology (the love of God, hope, reconciliation, the reign of God). It does, however, mean that it adopts a perspective of its own in dealing with them ... they are always accompanied or even brought into being by some great suffering.

I believe that in the epistemological break to which suffering leads, the practical and ethical orientation of understanding comes into view (Sobrino 1984: 28).

The suffering of God as seen in the passion of Jesus Christ plays an especially powerful role in the hermeneutical pathway of shared suffering. Takatso Mofokeng's own work on a Christology that speaks meaningfully to the crossbearers and crucified ones of South Africa is a moving example. Drawing on the work of Sobrino and Barth, Mofokeng's *The Crucified Among the Crossbearers* (1983) interprets the humanity of God in Christ by way of a *theologia crucis*, wherein a strong linkage is made between the suffering of black South Africans and the suffering of Jesus on the cross. Moreover, Mofokeng makes a compelling linkage between the resurrection of Christ and the anticipated, even demanded, resurrection of 'the crucified among the crossbearers' of South Africa. In a statement that could have been made by Rev. Cyprian Ramosime of the Bakubung ba Ratheo (see above, chapter three), Mofokeng dedicates his thesis to 'comrade and brother Ntsizi Moremi' with the words, 'The crossbearers of our time have a right to resurrection *in their lifetime*' (1983: viii). Further, in a statement that could have been made with reference to the entire Back to the Land Campaign, Mofokeng relates the demand for resurrection to the need for empowerment for praxis: 'In the entire incarnation unto death, or the entire history of the cross of the son of God, God creates and empowers the poor and the weak to become active subjects of their own history. He ends their passive resignation and inactivity. He ends their tolerance of indignities and dispossession at the hands of their fellow men' (1983: 258). The relational linkages made between the *memoria passionis, mortis et resurrectionis* of Jesus Christ and that of the dispossessed and impoverished black communities of South Africa play a formative role in the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities.

The linkage between suffering and eschatology in *The Road to Damascus* is also of significance for the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. The suffering of Jesus, who is seen as one of the poor and oppressed, is related to his good news of the coming Reign of God. This relation is crucial in a grounded approach to eschatology, wherein the *memoria passionis* is never far from the *memoria resurrectionis*, and the anticipation of the future in the present goes beyond prolepsis to praxis. The language of the *Road to Damascus* is particularly useful, in that the Reign of God is understood to be simultaneously transcendent and immanent: 'The Reign of God begins in this life but stretches out beyond this life. It is transcendent and eschatological without being unconcerned about the problems and suffering of the poor in this life.' More concerned with immanence than imminence, the statement defines the Reign of God as 'this world, completely transformed in accordance with God's plan.' This articulation of an eschatology that is both transcendent and transformative serves as a good introduction to the theology of hope evident in the *borapedi* and praxis of the TLRC communities, all the more so given the specific reference in the *Road to Damascus* to the land restoration clause in the Jubilee tradition as a sign of the Reign of God on earth.

The term 'transformative eschatology' is thus preferred to that of, for example, 'realised eschatology' (see below), in concert with the theme of transformation evident throughout the thesis. Transformative eschatology is characterised by action in hope (Bosch 1991), in this case the action in hope of communities who are both the subjects of their history and subjects who seek to be empowered as such by God through the Holy Spirit. There may thus be said to be a *co-subjectivity* of God and people, *Modimo le batho*, in the struggles of the TLRC communities for the restoration of land and life. Such a co-subjectivity might best be seen as part of the inclusive relationality of the *borapedi* of the communities, now extended to include a joint participation in the transformative Reign of God 'in our lifetime.' At the same time, it would be misleading to suggest that such a transformative eschatology has received any systematic articulation to date. Further research, seeking to answer the basic question, 'How shall we live between the already-but-not-yet of the Reign of God in our lifetime?' - a question that highlights the inherent linkage between eschatology and ethics, and seems especially apposite in the period of transition - is necessary for the implicit to be made explicit in the theology of the communities. Further, a caution concerning the penultimacy of such a transformative eschatology is in order. Indeed, even the word 'penultimacy' may be too optimistic, for we may be further from the fullness of the Reign of God than we think, whatever our praxis in God's name - in which case the word 'antepenultimacy' may be a better

indication of the contingent nature of all human effort to participate in the coming-and-now-is/is-yet-to-be Reign of God on earth 'in our lifetime.'

Our consideration of the historical interpretive crisis concerning the bible and land in South Africa has led us into, and part way through, the 'incomprehensible paradox,' following the relational hermeneutical pathway of shared suffering. We turn now to the methodological interpretive crisis of the bible and the Word of God, and the identification of *struggle* as a second relational hermeneutical pathway. While we will return to Mofokeng's 'incomprehensible paradox' below, it may be anticipated at this point that a grounded biblical hermeneutics of land restitution is indeed liberative and transformative, and is so through a participative relationality involving a mutual engagement of the suffering of God and the suffering of the people of God.

### 5.1.2 Addressing Itumeleng Mosala's Ideological Critique of the Bible as the 'Word of God'

While liberative texts in the bible (e.g. Exodus 3; Leviticus 25; Luke 4) have been read with a hermeneutics of liberation by those who have suffered and struggled against oppression, dispossession and its attendant poverty (Boesak 1977, 1985; Kairos Theologians 1985-1986; Nolan 1976, 1988; Tutu 1982, 1983), some Black theologians, most notably Itumeleng Mosala, have criticised this hermeneutics for its lack of ideological critique of the biblical text. For Mosala this represents an epistemological contradiction and a certain naïveté on the part of black biblical exegetes. While they employ an ideological critique of the biblical interpreter, a lack of ideological critique of the biblical text is seen to leave black liberation theologians vulnerable to the elements of oppression which are seen to inhere in the text, thus subverting the liberative quality of the hermeneutics they practise (Mosala 1989: 26-36). In contrast, Mosala's approach is to insist upon a 'theoretically well-grounded' biblical hermeneutics of liberation, wherein the view of the bible as a univocal, non-ideological 'Word of God' is critiqued as an 'ideological manoeuvre' on the part of the classes who hold economic, political and discursive power. To speak of the bible as *the* 'Word of God' is ideological for Mosala in that it implies that the bible is above criticism (1986:178). The concept of the 'Word of God,' he argues, 'is an ideological manoeuvre whereby ruling class interests in the bible as in our society are converted into a faith that transcends social, political, racial, sexual and economic divisions' (1986:179). It is thus argued that a valid biblical hermeneutics of liberation cannot start with the biblical text; it must rather start with 'the social, cultural, political and economic world of the black working class' (1986:181). Differently put, a theoretically well-grounded



black biblical hermeneutics of liberation must start not with a non-ideological and universalistic conception of the bible as the Word of God but rather with the particularity of the black struggle. Further, argues Mosala, to be truly liberating such a hermeneutics must be 'materialist' as well as 'hermeneutical': 'Black theology will have to rediscover the black working-class and poor peasant culture in order to find for itself a materialist-hermeneutical starting point' (1989:26).

An ideological critique of *both* text and interpreter is thus necessary, insists Mosala. The question then becomes one of ideology squared, as it were, for an ideological critique is itself made from an ideological location. Adopting a Marxist perspective, and following the work of Norman Gottwald in the application to biblical studies of social scientific methodology (Gottwald 1979; ed., 1983), Mosala is suspicious of the class origins and interests of the text, and of the ideological ends its production may be seen to have served. Underlying his suspicion and method is a recognition that the biblical text is a site of specific class conflicts involving both historical and cultural aspects (Mosala 1986: 187). Employing historical-critical and historical-materialist analyses to interrogate respectively the material and ideological 'conditions' of the text, Mosala seeks to expose the socio-economic and political locations and commitments of the biblical text as we now have it.

Concomitantly, with respect to the biblical interpreter, the socio-economic and political locations and commitments of the reader are interrogated by Mosala. 'The biblical hermeneutics of liberation,' he declares, 'is thoroughly tied up with the political commitments of the reader.'<sup>10</sup> This means that 'not only is the bible a product and record of class struggles, but it is also a site of similar struggles acted out by the oppressors and oppressed, exploiters and exploited of our society even as they read the Bible. Those, therefore, that are committed to the struggles of the black oppressed and exploited people cannot ignore the history, culture and ideologies of the dominated black people as their primary hermeneutical starting point' (Mosala 1986: 196-197). Moreover, Mosala accords methodological priority to the 'socio-ideological' location and commitment of the reader, thus seeing the category of the black (readers') struggle, from the first encounters between black and white in Southern African to the present, as the point of departure for any black hermeneutics. A dialectic of mutual ideological interrogation between interpreter and text may thus be seen to be at work, in which

<sup>10</sup> That the word 'reader' is used to designate interpreter reveals a distanced assumption of literacy that is largely unsubstantiated in rural communities struggling for their land, even when the biblical text is available to be read in the first language of the interpreter. Most biblical interpreters in the TLRC communities have the bible made available to them through the oral reading of the text by a literate member of the family, congregation or community.

the liberative initiative lies with the interpreter. This dialectic brings us to the words with which Mosala concludes *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa*, and which Josiah Young has called the 'iconoclastic refrain' of his biblical scholarship: 'the poor and exploited must liberate the bible so that the bible may liberate them' (Mosala 1989: 193; 1991: 267; Young 1993: 218).

The multivalent scope of Mosala's stated hermeneutical concerns (historical, cultural and ideological; socio-economic and political) and his foregrounding of the interpreter may be seen to be in resonance with the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. His interactive approach to the relation between the struggles in the text and the struggles of its interpreters is particularly useful. Mosala attempts to interrogate and expose the cultural and ideological presuppositions inherent in the texts and then 'bounce them off those of the history, culture and class of the reader,' and in this way to 'unleash the forces of struggle that each brings in the encounter with the other.' In so doing Mosala endeavours to show how 'one can relive the struggle of the communities behind the texts as well as that of the communities this side of the texts as a new practice' (Mosala 1989: 123-124). Mosala's references to encountering and reliving community struggles back and forth through the text/interpreter distancing is of significance for an appreciation of the relational hermeneutical dynamic of interpretive participation on the part of local biblical interpreters in the struggles of the biblical communities and characters they interpret, and *vice versa* (e.g. the exodus, the story of Zelophehad's daughters, the Jubilee tradition, the story of Naboth's vineyard, the return of the exiles to rebuild Jerusalem). *In this, a second relational hermeneutical pathway may be identified: to that of shared suffering is added that of shared struggle.*

However, while Mosala's call for an ideological critique of both text and interpreter has been widely acknowledged as necessary for a well-grounded theory and practice of a critical biblical hermeneutics of liberation and transformation, his own approach to that project has come in for heavy criticism. His uncompromisingly Marxist approach to a black hermeneutics of struggle, the disempowering effect on the hermeneutics of the poor of his attack on the bible as the Word of God, an insufficiently critical estimation of the extent to which social-scientific methods can take us 'behind the text,' the inaccessibility to those who live on the ground of his densely constructed academic prose,<sup>11</sup> and his party-political

<sup>11</sup> Mosala's prose and syntax are beyond the reach of most of those on whose behalf he writes - the members of the TLRC communities, for example, most of whom are not literate. The rural dispossessed cannot be said to be the intended audience of his written works. This observation gives rise to a contradiction between the medium and the message in Mosala's written works: if, as Mosala is fond of saying, 'the poor must liberate the bible so that the bible can liberate the poor,' it will not be in Gottwaldian prose in the English language. In contrast to his published work, however, Mosala's oral style is readily accessible, raising again the question of orality and

affiliation (AZAPO) have left him increasingly isolated in debates concerning hermeneutics in a context of transition.<sup>12</sup> We will pursue the critique of Mosala's work in some detail in order to clear a path for the hearing of the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities in their own words and voice. To reiterate a point made at the outset of the chapter, the primary concern in this discussion goes beyond the question of whether biblical hermeneutics 'on the ground' is liberative and transformative in community struggles for ancestral land, to ask how they are so and what they have to teach us.

Beyond an instrumental use of Marxist social analysis in the exposé of the ideological presuppositions inherent in texts and their interpretation, and despite his stated commitment to the need for a mutual interrogation of the cultural and the political in a black hermeneutics of liberation, Mosala has adopted an almost deterministic historical-materialist ideological position which has been seen, from both within and without black theological circles, to have emphasised class analysis to the marginalisation of race and cultural analysis (Parratt 1989; Pityana 1994). Barney Pityana, in a recent analysis of where Black theology has been and where it may be going, acknowledges on the one hand the value of Mosala's critique of a black biblical exegesis that does not recognise the ideological conflict in the text and that thus satisfies itself with a 'superficial and selective reliance on a few texts in order to dramatise the claims of Black Theology' (Pityana 1994:177). On the other hand, Pityana finds it necessary to flag the danger he sees in a class analysis that pays too little attention to race and culture in Black Theology, thus marginalising black constituencies on the ground:

What this historical-materialist trend in biblical hermeneutics has done is to move Black theology very strongly in the direction of a class analysis and to diminish the attention paid to race and culture. While this approach has maintained the integrity of the biblical material and avoided the selectivity which earlier Black theology's exegesis was rightly criticised for, it has unfortunately also marginalised the claims of indigenous Christianity and the African traditional religions (1994:177).

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textuality, and of the distancing from speech to text, in the process of doing and/or writing theology. As noted by Barney Pityana, considering the course of Black Theology since 1989, 'Within South Africa, Black theology appears to be isolated in academic institutions, engaged in an abstruse academic discourse.' Pityana, writing critically from within that academic discourse, and seeking to (re)build bridges with local congregations and communities, identifies a crucial gap in the theologian/community relationship: 'Perhaps this is due to the fact that the leading Black theologians are no longer pastors, parish ministers or even seminary lecturers, and have therefore not been able to impact on the life of the church at the base ecclesial level' (Pityana 1994: 180).

<sup>12</sup> The influence of party-political commitments and interests within the broader struggle for liberation and social justice in South Africa has had a marked effect on how Mosala's biblical hermeneutics have been interpreted and critiqued. Mosala's leadership, from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, of AZAPO, which chose not to contest the April 1994 elections, has left him somewhat ostracised, and ostracising, among liberation theologians whose party-political affiliation is with the ANC, a 'broader church'. Liberation theologians of different party-political affiliations talk past each other as much as to each other, and the impression gained is more that of mutual solitudes than that of dialogue. See the discussion of black theology in South Africa in Josiah Young, *African Theology: A Critical Analysis and Annotated Bibliography*, London, 1993, pp. 35-40.

Pityana's observation concerning indigenous Christianity and African traditional religions is important for an understanding of the continuities and discontinuities between the biblical hermeneutics of published black theologians and the biblical hermeneutics of rural communities struggling for their ancestral land. John Parratt, reviewing the Marxist trend in black theology in South Africa, questions Mosala's materialist analysis of African Independent Churches (AICs),<sup>13</sup> not because Parratt denies that the context in which the AICs have arisen is one of poverty, but because he sees Mosala 'skewing the evidence' to support his Marxist position:

Mosala's attempt to interpret African Independent Churches as a working-class phenomenon (in a Marxist sense) is far from all the evidence. While it is a fact that many of them (like most religious sects, early Christianity included) took their rise from depressed communities, there is little to support the view they represent the revolt of the masses against the bourgeoisie. Most of them originated with charismatic leaders and healers, a fact much more in accordance with a weberian interpretation than a marxist one. It is today far easier to find a hierarchical 'capitalist' independent church, where wealth and status are seen as symbols of spiritual leadership, than a communistic type (Parratt 1989:86).

Concerning Mosala's attack on the concept of the bible as the Word of God as used by both European and black theologians, Parratt observes, with relevance for a grounded biblical hermeneutics, that it is precisely the churches of the black poor which have led the way in the historical reversal in the interpretation and usage of the bible: from bible-as-instrument-of-oppression to bible-as-instrument-of-liberation. This reversal required of necessity a view of the bible as (the) authoritative Word of God:

Ironically it is in Mosala's 'non-bourgeois' churches most of all - not least the independent churches in Africa - where the Bible has been used as a weapon of revolt against civil and ecclesiastical power simply because it is believed to be the Word of God which has an authority above all human systems. The claim to this authority does not derive from western idealism, but rather from the Bible itself, to one degree or another in its various parts ... I find it very difficult in Itumeleng Mosala's writings to discover just what kind of authority remains for the Bible ... it is certainly less important than materialist economic theory (Parratt 1989: 84-85).

Parratt's point cuts to the nexus of spirituality and strategy in the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. Appeals over the heads of the 'earthly authority' of the apartheid state to the 'Higher Authority' of God were made on the basis of a 'high' view of

<sup>13</sup> See Itumeleng Mosala, 'African Independent Churches: A study in socio-theological protest,' in C. Villa-Vincencio and J. De Gruchy, eds., *Resistance and Hope: South African Essays in Honour of Beyers Naude*, Cape Town, 1985, pp.103-111. See also his 'The Relevance of African Traditional Religions and their Challenge to Black Theology,' in I. Mosala and B. Tlhagali, eds., *The Unquestionable Right to be Free: Black Theology from South Africa*, Johannesburg, 1986, pp.91-100.



the bible as Word of God. For example, the struggle of the Driefontein community to gain a reprieve from forced removal, to be discussed below, was waged in part on the terrain of biblical hermeneutics, with particular reference to the story of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21). Thus to deconstruct the bible-as-Word-of-God conceptualisation is to play a dangerous game in terms of the linkages made between spirituality and praxis in rural struggles for ancestral land.

Closer to the spirit and strategy of rural interpreters is Takatso Mofokeng's treatment of the Naboth narrative, which may thus be seen to serve as a bridge between published black biblical hermeneutics and the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. In an article entitled, 'Discovering Culture and its Influence in the Bible,' Mofokeng deals with both class and culture in biblical interpretation. Drawing freely on the work of Mosala, and sharing his criticism of the 'Calvinist mystification' that the bible as the Word of God 'interprets itself' and 'can only be read uncritically and obediently by all Christians,' Mofokeng nonetheless sees great strategic potential in exploring 'the elements in the cultures of biblical communities which were used as ideological weapons of struggle by the opposing classes or groups in those ancient societies' (Mofokeng 1992: 6). Unlike Mosala, his approach to the uses of a materialist reading of scripture is not deterministic; rather, class analysis is seen as essential but not in itself sufficient for a Black African hermeneutics of resistance and struggle, wherein biblical interpretation is seen to be part and parcel of the task of cultural workers. Examining the gospel narrative of the feeding of the five thousand, for example, Mofokeng identifies 'a struggle between two cultural practices':

One is a culturally established pattern of sharing whatever one has, which was still entrenched in the rural areas of Palestine during Jesus' time. The other is an equally strong if not stronger cultural practice of individual and exclusive ownership of the means of livelihood which was entrenched in the ruling-class-introduced and dominated money economy that was based in the urban centres of first-century Palestine. According to the former cultural practice you *eat by belonging*, while according to the latter you *eat through buying* (1992:11-12, italics his).

The cultural struggle identified as that between 'eating by belonging' *versus* 'eating through buying' is of great relevance for the struggles, material and hermeneutical, of the TLRC communities. With relevance for the linkages between *borapedi* and praxis discussed above in chapter three, Mofokeng argues that the prayer of Jesus on the occasion of the feeding of the five thousand sacralises the cultural practice of sharing of the rural peasantry, lending it greater legitimacy - 'sacred legitimacy.'

Turning to the Naboth story, Mofokeng notes that in both contemporary and biblical societies the struggles of the oppressed for social justice involve in part refusing to surrender 'social space' to the cultures of the ruling classes. In the case of Naboth and Ahab, much cited in the struggles of landless communities,<sup>14</sup> the struggle is seen to be between that of an ancestral cultural practice intended to protect the poor and a more recent and imported monarchist cultural practice intended to consolidate the wealth and power of the King:

The story of the struggle for land between king Ahab and Naboth is a case in point (1Kings 21). In this tragic story, both Naboth and Ahab invoke a cultural practice either to protect or acquire that piece of land. In the case of Naboth the basis of his refusal to yield to the king's request, that later appears to be a demand, is the cultural practice that was intended to protect the poor and weak in Israelite society against the greed of the rich and the powerful. It stated that land was inalienable and should remain inside the family throughout its generations. This cultural practice was reinforced by an invocation of religion: 'The Lord forbid...' (v.3). In his response, Ahab through his wife, also invoked a religious cultural practice that linked the rule of kings with the divine. Jezebel, the queen, wrote in a charge sheet against Naboth: 'You have cursed God and the king' (v.10). We can see that in this uneven contest for land one cultural practice has been elevated to 'national' status, hence its greater weight over against that which protects the weak and the poor. That notwithstanding, Naboth, the peasant from Jezreel, still used the culture of the poor as a defensive weapon against ruling class cultural attack, albeit unsuccessfully ... This story is to my mind a clear case illustrating the point that the class struggle was also waged at a cultural level (Mofokeng 1992: 10-11).

Mofokeng's discussion conjoins religio-cultural analysis with socio-economic analysis in a way that brings it into dialogue with the multivalent integrality that marks the land struggles of rural communities. The 'culture of the poor', a useful formulation, involves both God and the ancestors in the land struggles of both Naboth and the TLRC communities. To summarise the biblical tradition: the land may not be sold in perpetuity, it must remain the ancestral land of the family to whom it was originally allocated, for the land belongs to God and not to the Israelites, who are seen by God, and who are to see themselves, as sojourners out of Egypt (cf. Leviticus 25; 1 Kings 21). As for the culture of the ruling class, Mofokeng hints at but does not develop the foreign sourcing of the monarchist cultural practice when he names Jezebel and refers to her role in the dispossession of Naboth. He also leaves uninvestigated the question of why such a damning account of a king of Israel should have survived a ruling-class editorial process, the answer to which likely has more to do with the conflict between the ruling classes of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms than it has to do with a liberative motivation on the part of the editors of the text as we now have it. This analysis, if valid, supports the contention of John De Gruchy that scripture not only interprets

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Desmond Tutu, 'The Village of Naboth and Duncan Village,' in *Hope and Suffering*, 1983, pp.39-42; and the SACC and SACBC joint publication, *Relocation: The Churches' Report on Forced Removals in South*

itself, but has the capacity to liberate itself when read with the 'spectacles of the victims' (see below). As for Jezebel, it is too easy either to blame her exclusively, for Ahab is certainly complicit, or to absolve her, for she is the source of the strategy that sees Ahab subvert the 'culture of the poor'<sup>15</sup> by arranging for Naboth to be falsely accused, so circumventing the ancestral-familial tradition of Israel concerning its land. Indeed, it is possible to read the text against its redactors, seeing in its exposé of the way in which Ahab subverted the 'culture of the poor' not only a southern critique of a northern king, but a more universal critique of corruption, violence and dispossession on the part of all rulers - southern, northern and foreign alike. Such a reading sees the text as championing the 'culture of the poor' as the rightful culture of Israel, from which she departs at her peril.

Thus, with respect to the role of ideological critique in a biblical hermeneutics of liberation, we affirm a position that sees class analysis of the text as necessary but not in itself sufficient - a position argued from within black theological circles as early as Lebamang Sebidi's contribution to the anthology *The Unquestionable Right to be Free* edited by Mosala and Tlhaqali in 1986. In 'The Dynamics of the Black Struggle and its Implications for Black Theology,' Sebidi argues compellingly that:

If the materialist or class-analysis approach errs, not by acknowledging the determinative role of material conditions but by down-playing the determinative role of belief systems as mere reflections of the base, the idealist or race-analysis approach errs by downplaying and de-emphasising the role of economic motivations in South Africa's social formation. It is not in what both camps uphold, but in what both camps tend to reject or de-emphasise that the fault lies (Sebidi 1986:31).

Sebidi himself may be seen to be furthering the analysis of Steve Biko, whose suspicion of a class analysis was similarly not that it was inaccurate or unhelpful, but that in isolation from race analysis it had the potential to mislead the struggle of black South Africans, who were oppressed both because they were black and because they were poor. In his important article, 'Black Consciousness and the Quest for a True Humanity,' Biko argues his case that, while racism may have begun as an 'offshoot of the economic greed of whites,' it had gained a life, monstrous, of its own:

There is no doubt that the colour question in South African politics was originally introduced for economic reasons. The leaders of the white community had to create some kind of barrier between blacks and whites so that the whites could enjoy privileges at the expense of blacks

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*Africa*, Johannesburg, 1984. See also the discussion of the Driefontein case below.

<sup>15</sup> I maintain the quotation marks around 'culture of the poor' because it is not clear to what extent the obviously landed Naboth is poor. Mofokeng's earlier formulation is perhaps the better one: Naboth, in saying that he is not allowed by law to sell his family's inheritance, is participating in an ancestral cultural practice intended to protect the poor (see Leviticus 25).

and still feel free to give a moral justification for the obvious exploitation that pricked even the hardest of white consciences ... in South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe in the inferiority of the black man, so much so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the economic greed exhibited by white people, it has now become a serious problem on its own. White people now despise black people, not because they need to reinforce their attitude and so justify their position of privilege but simply because they actually believe that black is inferior and bad. This ... is what makes South African society racist (Biko 1988: 104).

While one may wonder if Biko is right to concede that the white consciousness of racial superiority was the child of its economic greed, it is clear that both race and class analyses are necessary, involving Mosala's call for a 'mutual interrogation' of the cultural, historical and political in black hermeneutics (see above, chapter one). Takatso Mofokeng, for his part, examines the relation between race and class analysis in black theology in the course of a critique of 'non-racialism' as an ideology designed to mask the right of black South Africans to the land. Completing Biko's point, and in concert with Sebidi, Mofokeng finds that, if class analysis needs to be deepened by race analysis, the same must be said of race analysis: it needs to be sharpened by class analysis. Significantly for the hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, the nexus of race and class analysis in Mofokeng's argument is the land:

Black people have been dispossessed of their land which is the basic means of all production and subsistence as well as a source of power. They have been turned into dispossessed workers whose only possession is their labour power. By identifying black people as workers black theologians have lifted our struggle beyond civil rights to human rights, from an exclusive struggle against racism to a social and national revolution' (Mofokeng 1989: 109).

Given the ongoing poverty and economic deprivation suffered by most black South Africans in the transition period, and given the time it will take for racist attitudes to be transformed, we may credit the arguments of Biko, Sebidi, Mosala and Mofokeng with an ongoing relevance. Again, the conjoining of religio-cultural analysis with socio-economic and political analysis is seen to be essential in a grounded hermeneutics of the struggle for the land in South Africa, and of the role of the bible therein.

This still leaves us, however, with the question of the way in which the bible survives critical ideological scrutiny to be an empowering and authoritative source for a liberative and transformative theology of land restitution. In a debate that parallels the debate in feminist biblical hermeneutics concerning the extent to which an oppressive tradition may be seen to be useful in a struggle for liberation (Sakenfeld 1989; Schneiders 1989; Schüssler-Fiorenza 1984; Tribble 1984, 1990), Mosala is seen to be underestimating the capacity of the biblical text to contain the seeds of its own liberation (De Gruchy 1991: 78), and to be an empowering cultural weapon in the black struggle (Young, 1993: 133-137). Josiah Young agrees with



Mosala 'regarding the illusion of a single Word of God, which obfuscates political struggle,' but asserts at the same time that the Word of God, approached with a Christo-centric ('Christ as the Oppressed One') hermeneutic, 'need not be discarded in hermeneutics of the black oppressed.' 'From a Pan-African perspective,' argues Young, 'the Word of God is the actual presence of Jesus Christ in the struggles of the black oppressed' (Young 1992: 134). Young's Christological approach to the Word of God may be seen to be compatible with that of Mofokeng (1983), whose *Crucified Among the Crossbearers* (1983) demonstrates, as we have seen, a similar movement back and forth between the passion and cross of Christ in the biblical text and the suffering and struggles of black South Africans today - a relational dynamic illustrated well in the theological reflections of the Barolong following their arrest on Good Friday 1992, discussed above. This relational dynamic, wherein the Word of God is experienced and understood as an metatextual event, lifts the biblical hermeneutics of Young and Mofokeng out of the Word-of-God-as-text trap in a way that Mosala's hermeneutics does not. This is not to imply that the biblical text is not important for the Word of God, but to argue that the Word of God is not bound to the text. It is rather an event requiring both text and interpreter, a participative event that follows relational hermeneutical pathways - chiefly those of shared suffering, struggle and celebration in the case of the dispossessed, and which involves, in the event, the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process.

### 5.1.3 Toward a Relational, Liberative and Transformative Biblical Hermeneutics

The foregoing criticism notwithstanding, Mosala's 'iconoclastic refrain' that 'the poor must liberate the bible so that the bible may liberate the poor' provides a useful point of departure for a restatement of Takatso Mofokeng's 'incomprehensible paradox.' The clue lies in its chiasmic a-b-b'-a' formulation, and the recognition that chiasmus is more useful than paradox as a way of thinking about the contradictions involved in both the historical and methodological interpretive crises in biblical hermeneutics in South Africa. We may ask, for example, whether the bible's oppressive aspects may be seen in the context of its liberative aspects, and its liberative aspects in the context of its oppressive aspects, and the whole chiasmus considered before any stones are thrown. We will return to this question following a consideration of John De Gruchy's response to the call for an ideological critique of both biblical text and interpreter.

De Gruchy, in a discussion of the 'Liberating Word' in his *Liberating Reformed Theology* (1991), a title that seeks to be constructively ambiguous, concurs with Mosala and

others that an ideological critique of both text and interpreter is required in a biblical hermeneutics of liberation. He identifies the two related critical challenges as follows: '(that) the Bible is inevitably read from an ideological point of view and that within the Bible itself we find different ideological trajectories' (De Gruchy 1991:78). He addresses the question of the interpreter first, and does so in terms of Míguez Bonino's 'epistemological privilege of the poor,' wherein 'we need not only the spectacles of Scripture to know God the creator and redeemer in Christ, but we also need the spectacles of the victims of society in order to discern the liberating Word in Scripture itself' (De Gruchy 1991:78). With respect to the need to critique the biblical text with its conflicting ideological trajectories,<sup>16</sup> De Gruchy asserts that 'we need to recognise not only that Scripture interprets itself (*Scriptura scripturae interpres*), but that this implies that Scripture, precisely because it does witness to the liberating Word of God, also has the power to liberate itself. Thus there is a need to reaffirm but also to retrieve in a new way Calvin's christological "canon within the canon"' (De Gruchy 1991: 78). De Gruchy thus acknowledges Mosala's call to an ideological critique of both interpreter and biblical text, but takes a significantly different route thereafter, recognising within the biblical canon a liberative trajectory, focused on a Christological reading of the Word that has the capacity to critique the oppressive trajectories within the same corpus of texts, thus allowing us to assert the bible's capacity to 'liberate itself'.

At this point, however, we need to ask De Gruchy how the bible may be said to interpret and liberate *itself*. How is its self-interpretive and self-liberative capacity realised? Considering this question in the light of the relational hermeneutical approach of the TLRC communities, we may wish to restate the question, asking not how the bible's capacity for self-interpretation and self-liberation is realised, but by whom? Who is its subject? Effecting a critical engagement of the hermeneutical concerns of Mosala and De Gruchy, it is possible to answer that the bible's capacity for liberative self-interpretation must be realised by the poor reading with the 'spectacles of the victims.' While the use of the word 'victims' (De Gruchy 1991: 78-83) may be seen to be disempowering, in that it tends to reinforce a view of self as victim, and while De Gruchy himself finds that the associated assertion of an 'epistemological privilege of the poor' is in need of qualification,<sup>17</sup> the statement does enable us to move beyond

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Walter Brueggemann, 'Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel,' in N.K. Gottwald, ed., *The Bible and Liberation: Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1983, 307-333.

<sup>17</sup> De Gruchy discusses four qualifications of the 'epistemological privilege of the poor': 1) while we learn from the Scriptures themselves that the poor are victims in a special sense, and that the way in which we relate to the poor is indicative of our understanding of the gospel, not all the victims of society are poor (e.g. women are not necessarily poor, but are victims of systemic patriarchy); 2) the liberating Word speaks to all human need,

the two extreme views wherein either the liberative role of the interpreter is emphasised to the exclusion of the liberative potentiality of the text, or the liberative potentiality of the text is emphasised to the exclusion of the liberative role of the interpreter.

Returning to Mosala's formulation that 'the poor must liberate the bible so that the bible may liberate the poor,' we may ask what a more nuanced chiasmus would look like. Can we, for example, see the capacity of the poor to interpret and liberate the bible in the context of the capacity of the bible to interpret and liberate itself, and the capacity of the bible to interpret and liberate itself in the context of the capacity of the poor to interpret and liberate the bible? Second, can we see, in light of the first chiasmus, the capacity of the poor to liberate the bible in the context of the capacity of the bible to liberate the poor - and thus speak of the reciprocal liberation of interpreter and text? The two taken together allow us to see the Word of God as a liberative and transformative event - an interactive engagement involving both relationality and criticality. Such a formulation allows us to consider the participative relationality of grounded hermeneutics in a way that does justice to the need for an ideological critique of both text and interpreter, but in a way that does not preclude the distinctiveness and contribution of the voices of local biblical interpreters, who may go about their critical and creative hermeneutics of land restitution in ways that are not readily recognisable in terms of the published debates to date in the field of the biblical hermeneutics of liberation (see the discussion of a grounded hermeneutics of suspicion in the Dinkwanyane interview, and of affirmation in the Leroro interview in the following chapter). For example, the experience of the Holy Spirit as co-interpreter of the biblical text is a question seldom addressed in the written debate, yet is an essential consideration on the ground, such that the liberative and transformative engagement across the text/interpreter distanciation does not happen apart from the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

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including the desperate need for conversion of those who oppress others, those who abuse power, and those whose wealth prevents them from 'enter[ing] the kingdom of God (cf. the *Road to Damascus*, which is essentially a call to conversion to those with power and wealth); 3) the bible is only truly understood within a community of faith, in openness to the Spirit, even though the living Word does speak directly to individual people and their needs ... thus, when we speak of the ability of the poor or other victims to hear God's Word we imply that they do so as they share a common life together as communities of faith (e.g. Base Christian Communities in Latin America); and 4) although the God of the prophetic tradition in the Bible takes sides with the oppressed and speaks to their needs, the same tradition indicates that God can also speak against the oppressed (e.g. Israel in the wilderness following its liberation, wanting to go back to Egypt) ... even though the victims may perceive the message of Scripture more clearly, their 'epistemological privilege' is not one of determining or controlling what the Word declares (De Gruchy 1991:80-82). This last qualification is supported almost to the letter in a speech by Enos Chiloane of the Moletete, who cites Numbers 14 (the 'let us return to Egypt' passage) as one of the texts that 'compels and exhorts' him and his co-returnees to 'fear the Lord' and 'complete the mission of God' (see discussion below).

<sup>18</sup> See the discussion in ASCA (1985) and Makhubu (1988). Clodovis Boff, discussing his 'correspondence of relationships' model makes an intriguing linkage between spontaneity, the spirit and 'creative fidelity' in the



With respect to the ideological conflicts in the bible and their relevance for the Word of God, Wolfram Kistner wonders in effect what all the fuss is about.<sup>19</sup> Rejecting Mosala's ideological critique of the concept of the bible as the Word of God, he declares, 'The contradictions within the bible are not a problem for the Word of God. Faith experiences in conflict with each other *is* the Word of God. The Word of God is not given but must be found - precisely in such contradictions.'<sup>20</sup> Kistner goes on to argue that there is a line, or trajectory, 'the memory of liberation' that runs throughout the bible from the Exodus to the Jubilee to Jesus and beyond, which we may take as normative for the Word of God. Far from seeing the Word of God as trapped in the text, and the text as a static object, his approach sees the text as a dynamic medium, and the Word of God as an event involving text and interpreter. Seen in the light of Kistner's approach to the Word of God, the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities may be seen as encountering and participating in the Word of God through the relational hermeneutical pathways of, so far in the discussion, shared suffering and struggle. Further, as we will see in chapter seven, this biblical hermeneutics has much in common with what Sandra Schneiders has described as a 'hermeneutics of transformation,' wherein the text is viewed not as a 'fixed semantic container' but as a dynamic 'mediation of meaning which takes place as an event in the interpreter' (Schneiders 1989:5).<sup>21</sup>

These considerations bring us to the work of Gerald West and the Institute for the Study of the Bible (ISB), based in the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg. In an ongoing

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hermeneutics of the poor: 'At the same time, for an ordinary hermeneutic, the "transposition of sense" from text to life proceeds in a spontaneous fashion, so that, even when the 'application' becomes difficult, the *need* for the 'application' is always felt by Christian communities as normal. As a consequence, here too, as for the primitive community, a kind of *creative fidelity* reigns, with the result that a genuine 'spiritual sense' continues in substantial identity in the most diverse experiential contexts. Perhaps this is the spirit of the gospel. It is not meaningless, then, for these communities to call these 'applications' - as they do so call them - 'word of God,' or 'message of salvation,' or the like. Thus, *meaning transpires*, 'comes to light,' in historical currency, through and beyond the letter of the text of the past ... The functioning of hermeneutical dialectic implies a "*pneumatic*" *reading of scripture*, consisting in the agent's compenetration with the meaning that informs scripture, and a sustained familiarity with the word dwelling in it' (Boff 1987 in Sugirtharajah, ed., 1991:29,31, italics mine).

<sup>19</sup> Wolfram Kistner served as Secretary of the Department of Justice and Reconciliation of the SACC under Desmond Tutu and Beyers Naudé in the 1980s, and was particularly active with Tutu in support of communities facing forced removal.

<sup>20</sup> See Interview with Wolfram Kistner, Johannesburg, 15 June, 1993, unpublished, p.2.

<sup>21</sup> We have already observed that the feminist debate concerning the liberative use of a tradition that is both liberative and oppressive is instructive for the debate on biblical hermeneutics in black theology. The biblical hermeneutics of South African women, and the work of Schüssler-Fiorenza (1984), Tribble (1984), Sakenfeld (1989) and Schneiders (1989) will be pursued in chapter seven. With respect to the 'mediation' or the transpiration of meaning, and the role of suffering and struggle therein, we do well to recall Gregory Baum's discussion of the inter-play between the practical and hermeneutical dimensions in the praxis of liberation theology, which Baum defines as 'the interaction between knowledge and action oriented toward human emancipation.' While all forms of theology recognise the impact of knowledge on practice, states Baum, 'liberation theology is keenly aware that there is also an impact of praxis on human consciousness and hence on the reading of social reality and its texts (Baum 1991: 11).



research project that seeks 'to develop an interface between biblical studies and ordinary readers of the Bible, particularly the poor and oppressed,' West and his colleagues have argued for the importance of a joint commitment to the 'ordinary reader' and to critical modes of reading the biblical text. Relating the issue of ideological criticism to that of biblical hermeneutics at the local level, West sees two major areas of debate: 'the ideological nature of the biblical text, and the role of the ordinary reader' (G. West 1992:4). In a footnote designed to acknowledge the importance of the oral hearing of the bible in local communities, West includes in the term 'ordinary reader' the 'many who are illiterate, but who listen to, discuss and retell the bible.' With respect to the ideological nature of the biblical text, West begins by 'affirming, on the one hand, that there is no innocent interpreter, no innocent text (following Tracy 1987), and on the other hand, that interpretation is still possible.' The conjunction of these two sentences leads West to identify two 'moments' in the interpretive task:

The first moment of the interpretive task requires a hermeneutic of suspicion through which we have to face the actuality of the ideologies in ourselves and in the bible itself. The second moment of the interpretive task requires a hermeneutic of trust which includes *accountability* to present communities of faith and struggle, and *continuity* with past communities of faith and struggle in and behind the biblical text (West 1992:5, italics his).

West's conjoining of suspicion and trust in biblical hermeneutics may be seen to be congruent with the argument in chapter two that a grounded hermeneutics employs both suspicion and affirmation, deconstruction and reconstruction, critique and creativity. His recognition of the need for the 'second moment' finds deep resonance with the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. The work of ideological suspicion must be conjoined with that of creative affirmation. Further, that West's call for a hermeneutic of trust (the second moment) relates contemporary communities to biblical communities echoes the participative relational dynamic across the text/interpreter distancing which characterises inter-community engagement in local hermeneutics. This relationality is given definition by West's carefully-considered articulation of a hermeneutics of trust that is both accountable to contemporary communities and in continuity with past (biblical) communities. The ethical and temporal linkages signalled by these terms is useful for the task of making explicit what is implicit in the relationality between biblical and contemporary communities in local hermeneutics. Finally, West's characterisation of past and present communities as *communities of faith and struggle* may be seen to be compatible with the argument here that the interpretive event in the TLRC communities proceeds by way of the relational hermeneutical pathway, to name one, of shared struggle.

For those who recognise the need for both interpretive moments, West identifies two key elements which may be seen as holding together a hermeneutics of suspicion and a hermeneutics of trust:

First, biblical interpreters like Tracy, Mosala, Gottwald, Meyers, Felder, Schüssler Fiorenza, Tribble, Croatto and Schneiders all adopt and advocate critical modes of reading the Bible. Whether their focus is behind the text, on the text or in front of the text,<sup>22</sup> they are in agreement in their concern for a critical mode of reading. Their second commitment is a commitment to ordinary people, particularly the poor and oppressed, in the text and in their own contexts' (G. West 1992:5-6).

A discussion of the joint commitment to a critical mode of reading the Bible and to ordinary readers leads West to propose three parameters within which the ongoing hermeneutic debate within South Africa should take place: 'the ideological nature of the biblical text, accountability to ordinary readers of the Bible, and continuity with ordinary people in and behind the biblical text' (G. West 1992:9). Turning to the work of the ISB within these parameters, West makes a crucial linkage between the hermeneutics of 'ordinary readers' and of biblical scholars in the work of liberation and transformation, both 'have a significant contribution to make to our understanding of the Bible and to what God is doing in South Africa.' Uniting the work of the ISB is a methodology of reading the Bible that involves four 'crucial commitments': 1) a commitment to begin with reality as perceived by the 'organised base'; 2) a commitment to read the Bible in community; 3) a commitment to critical modes of reading the Bible; and 4) a commitment to socio-political transformation through Bible reading (West 1992:10-11). While some of the published work to date of the ISB has been criticised by some black theologians for an insufficiently self-critical methodology and a rather blue-eyed approach to the significance of its work (Maluleke 1995), the central commitment of West to the joint importance of critical modes of reading and the readings of the 'poor and oppressed' (the terms are somewhat distanced) is of enduring significance for a grounded biblical hermeneutics. As West has said, concluding a comparative critique of the published biblical

<sup>22</sup> West, with reference to his *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Pietermaritzburg, 1991, inserts a useful footnote at this point, summarising the three textual locations he identifies in critical modes of reading: 'Briefly, "reading behind the text" includes historical and sociological modes of reading. The focus here may be on historical and sociological reconstructions themselves (Meyers 1988), or on reading the text in the light of historical and sociological reconstructions (Sakenfeld 1989; Wittenburg 1991), or on particular historical and sociological methods of analysis (Mosala 1989; Schüssler Fiorenza 1983; Gottwald 1979). "Reading the text" includes literary, rhetorical and structuralist modes of reading. The focus here may be on the surface structure of literary compositions (Tribble 1978, 1979), or on the deep structures of the text (Jobling 1986), or on the narratological structure of the text (Bal 1986), or on the text as speech act (Lanser 1988). "Reading in front of the text" includes thematic, symbolic and metaphoric modes of reading. The focus here may be on the patterns, symbols and themes of the biblical text (Ruether 1983), or on the semantic axes of the Bible (Croatto 1987), or on the world produced and projected by the text (Schneiders 1989)' (West 1992: 5, note 34). As already indicated, we will pursue some of these modes of reading in the chapter which follows on feminist and womanist hermeneutics in local land struggles.

hermeneutics of Itumeleng Mosala and Allan Boesak, 'Unless the hermeneutical debate includes the poor and oppressed, it will prove to be largely irrelevant to the transformation of the country' (G. West 1990: 45).

The 'incomprehensible paradox' with which we began may thus be seen to give way to an interactive hermeneutical event wherein the ideological critique of both interpreter and text is practised as part of a participative relationality in which the liberative and transformative capacity of the interpreters and the biblical texts they interpret is realised through a critical and creative engagement, entered into in the power of the Holy Spirit, following the relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering and struggle. In this reciprocal engagement across the text/interpreter distancing the Word of God transpires.

## **5.2 A Critical Convergence of Liberative Traditions in Local Biblical Hermeneutics**

There is much in the interpretation and appropriation of biblical texts and traditions in the TLRC communities that will be familiar to advocates and practitioners of a Black hermeneutics of struggle, an African hermeneutics of inculturation, a Prophetic hermeneutics of liberation and transformation, and a Feminist hermeneutics, *contra* patriarchy, of women's empowerment and human liberation. Biblical hermeneutics on the ground, when viewed in the light of published Black African, Prophetic and Feminist biblical hermeneutics in South Africa, is marked by a critical and conditional convergence of these commitments and disciplines: critical both because of its significance in local struggles for land and because the convergence is proceeding by way of mutual interrogation; and conditional because the convergences evident to date may not, given the divergent forces still at work, be taken to be irreversible. The patriarchy inherent in, for example, an androcentric ancestral biblical hermeneutic is openly critiqued in the TLRC communities by rural women who no longer accept as definitive the male discursive power which has had the field of biblical hermeneutics to itself until very recently.<sup>23</sup> Again, the reciprocal influence of black and white liberation theologians upon each others' persons and hermeneutics is engaged in an internal critique which has been both enabling and conflicted, dialogical and dialectical. In the TLRC communities, while not wishing to overstate the case, it may be said that a grounded biblical hermeneutics is one which places a high priority on shared praxis, with the colour of the persons in question a significant but not exclusionary factor. Further, it may be said that being with, becoming with and



belonging with, in the *kamohelo* (welcome) and *koinonia* of the communities, is an inherent part of the relational dynamic of local hermeneutics.

At the same time, it is important to affirm that the relationality at work in local communities sacrifices neither community identity to a homologising non-racialism, nor *koinonia* and solidarity to a fractionalising isolationism. What it does do is recognise that relationality is of the essence of human life (*ubuntu-botho*), and that in a pluralistic context like that of South Africa, inter-relationality between black and white is a necessary aspect of relationality in general. The challenge on the ground, then, is to be intentional and pro-active, making the inter-relationality work for the community and, hopefully, for all involved. That the approach is pragmatic is given; that it wishes to be more than pragmatic is equally true. Acknowledging its contingency, and its variable rates of progress to date, the movement at the local level towards a critical convergence of Black, African, Prophetic and Womanist biblical hermeneutics with respect to land restitution may be seen as one of the enabling contributions which a grounded theology has to offer the disciplines of biblical studies and theological ethics, and the praxis of restitution and development.

The interpretation and appropriation of biblical texts and traditions at the local level expresses itself in its own terms, terms which are grounded in the language and experience of those who voice them, and which must be respected as such. They may not be co-opted into a homologised hermeneutic of reconstruction and development, for example, the authorship of which remains in the hands of a theological elite. A true conversation and debate, multi-lingual and multivalent, between and among professional, pastoral and lay theologians, urban and rural, is one of the clarion calls of a local hermeneutics. An approach grounded in local discourse, however, means that elites will have to work harder to hear that voice. The myth of 'voicelessness' will have to be discarded; and the challenge of listening to the voices of the other taken up with humility. The interpretive task inherent in linguistico-cultural translation is but one of the challenges facing such a mutual hearing and interaction. There is, perhaps more fundamentally, the bald fact that we may not assume that we can predict accurately the way(s) in which local interpreters approach biblical texts and traditions. We may not assume we know what the differences and similarities are between and among us before we listen and observe local hermeneutics in action. The word action is itself carefully chosen in this context, for, as we will see below, there is an interactive dynamic at work in the relation between interpreters and that which is interpreted, which may be seen as signalling the importance of relationality in

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Ackermann, D., Draper, J. and Mashinini, E., eds., *Women Hold Up Half the Sky: Women in the Church in Southern Africa*, Pietermaritzburg, 1991.



local hermeneutics: between and among the members of the interpreting community (wide embrace), external actors in the wider context, the texts and traditions being interpreted, and the Holy Spirit, who, as noted above, is experienced as a major actor in the hermeneutical process.

With respect to the critical convergence of African and Black hermeneutics, a local biblical hermeneutic that reads the text 'as it is',<sup>24</sup> for example, might be seen to be naïve and at odds with a Black hermeneutic that calls for an ideological critique of the text itself, thus arguing for a reading behind the text (Mosala 1986, 1989). It is precisely this 'might be', however, the use of the subjunctive mood, that signals the convergent potentialities of a grounded hermeneutic. A local reading of the bible *as it is* is not without an awareness of the need to suspect the bible as text, as a book brought to Africa by Europeans, from which delivery system and packaging the Word of God must be liberated.<sup>25</sup> While the bible as the 'Word of God' is a contentious issue for Mosala in particular, the recognition by the Spiritual Churches that their approach to the bible must involve a critical 'throwing off' of the 'mask of western culture' for the Word of God to be heard signals a move toward convergence with a Black hermeneutics of struggle that calls for mutual interrogation of the historical, cultural and political in a critical biblical hermeneutics of liberation. To the objection that the mask in question is worn by the interpreter and not the text, and thus that the throwing off of the mask does not answer Mosala's concern that the text itself be subject to ideological critique, it is answered that, while a critical approach to the text is essential, the ideological critique of the text is itself made by an interpreter, one who may or may not be wearing a mask, and who may or may not be aware of such a mask. When the mask is taken off, the degree of suspicion of the biblical text in rural communities is a searching one. As we will see below, a scything hermeneutic of suspicion was at work in the group interview in Dinkwanyane, in which the interpretation was offered, among others, that the first man, 'Adam', must have been a white man because he was taken from the earth (*adamah*) and the earth belongs to white men. 'In fact it was a white man that was made there from that earth!' declared Nathan Modipa, whose people had been forcibly removed from Boomplaas in 1956. 'He was white, because the whites

<sup>24</sup> Archbishop N.H. Ngada, op cit., p.15.

<sup>25</sup> See discussion below of the work of the ASCA Institute to document the biblical hermeneutics of the Spiritual Churches. The first section of a forth-coming introduction to the bible, for example, is entitled, 'Throwing off the Mask: Missionaries and Ethiopianism.' Archbishop Ngada states, 'It puts the bible as God's Word only. It tells you about the mask that people had to wear, and how the bible came to being ... It makes people understand that the bible is God's Word only, which came to people through people.'

have all the land!’<sup>26</sup> The passion with which this interpretation was argued in the group was understood to be directly related to the *memoria passionis* of the community. The bible was seen to have been written by white men because it came with white men in the form of a book (text) made by white men. That another member of the Dinkwanyane community, John Mphogo, resisted such an interpretation, arguing instead, in light of Psalm 24, that ‘this land is not a human being’s land, it’s God land,’ cautions us against homologising interpretive voices at the local level. For Mphogo, that the land had been taken by whites through capital, agricultural experience and coercion did not change the basic theological assertion that ‘the earth is the Lord’s’ and thus cannot be said to belong to the white race.<sup>27</sup> In the event, the critical convergence of liberative traditions in local biblical hermeneutics is a process of mutual interrogation which, though not without conflict, seeks to learn from and not obviate difference, towards the transformation of consciousness and society.

Relationality may be seen to play a major role in the critical convergence of liberative traditions in local biblical hermeneutics. The liberative hermeneutical traditions in question are conjoined, to the extent they are, by people as part of their lives. People are the subjects of the convergence. ‘Black’, ‘African’, ‘Prophetic’ and ‘Womanist’ hermeneutics are part of peoples’ lives as lived, part of their individual and communal narrativity. Again, it is the *who* questions that come to the fore in local hermeneutics. The relationality of a communal interpretive subject, the sense of ‘who we are,’ and its relation to ‘where we have been’ and ‘where we want to go,’ is the context for the critical convergence of liberative traditions discussed above. At the same time, that there are different and conflicting interpretations of ‘who we are,’ ‘where we have been’ and ‘where we want to go’ between and among the individuals within a communal interpretive subject (e.g. male and female, royal and commoner) cautions us against a view of local biblical hermeneutics as being univocal. Even in this, however, the relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering and struggle across the text/interpreter distancing may be seen to be operative, for biblical families (e.g. Abraham, Sarah and Hagar), communities (e.g. pre-exilic Jerusalem), and nations (e.g. Israel between Egypt and the promised land), were themselves no strangers to internal interpretive conflict.

<sup>26</sup> See the Group Interview with Members of the Dinkwanyane Community, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, 20 May, 1994, unpublished, p.11; and see the discussion below.

<sup>27</sup> John Mphogo, *ibid.*, p.19.

### 5.3 Participative Relationality in Local Biblical Hermeneutics: Introductory Cases

Turning from the question of convergence, a question that asks about the direction of local hermeneutics from the perspective of the wider hermeneutical context, we must ask how local hermeneutics is voiced from the inside. The discussion that follows identifies participatory relationality as the primary dynamic in local hermeneutics, wherein the relationality involved is inclusive of the Holy Spirit, the interpreting community, actors in the wider society and the communities and actors in the texts and traditions being interpreted. The participation involved is personal (both individual and communal), kinetic and kinesic as well as conceptual, and has an interactive *immediacy* that sees the interpreter participate in that which is interpreted. This participation is verbal and physical, through oral reading and hearing, preaching, testifying, story-telling, dreaming, singing, dancing and dramatic re-enactment, almost to the point of identification.<sup>28</sup>

#### 5.3.1 Bulhoek, the Israelites and the Exodus

Turning to cases, how do we describe the hermeneutics involved in, for example, the annual liturgical re-enactment of the exodus, including dance, song, speech, prayer, spontaneous exclamation, and ecstatic utterance, performed by the Congregation of the Israelites in Queenstown, a congregation which still includes survivors of the 1921 Bulhoek massacre? What do we make of the immediacy and intensity of an interpretive act which casts the interpreters in the role of participants in that which is interpreted? Is the theme of anamnesis and anamnestic solidarity useful in understanding such an interpretive event? In what sense is the physicality and personal participation formed by and in what sense is it formative for the hermeneutic? Are the interpreters participating in the suffering or the celebration, the bondage or the liberation, or both? If both, in what way(s)? And how is such an interpretive event linked to the praxis of the community?

Answering such questions fully will require further research with and by the community. At this stage several indicative points, instructive for the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities in general, may be raised. It seems clear that there is an anamnestic participation in the *memoria passionis* of the Israelites in Egypt on the part of the members of the community of Israelites of Queenstown, wherein the relational hermeneutical pathway of shared suffering of oppression is strongly at work. The anamnesis involves both the biblical

<sup>28</sup> It may be argued that this dynamic informs the 'correspondence of relationships' model advanced by Clodovis Boff, involving a mutual entering-into, a 'compenetration', of text and interpreter, in a way which points to the relational rationality of the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities. See Clodovis Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1987.



Israelites in Egypt and the Israelites of the Eastern Cape who fell at Bulhoek. There seems also to be a proleptic, even eschatological, participation through dance and song in the celebration of the liberation of the Israelites from Egypt, *en route* to the good land God was giving them. Taken together, the inter-community (the biblical Israelites and the Bulhoek Israelites) participation in suffering and celebration makes the hermeneutical event an empowering experience of 'combative spirituality' (C. West 1989a: 94) for all involved, with both the anamnesis and the prolepsis related to the praxis of survival and struggle of the community.

With respect to eschatology and praxis, it is necessary to ask whether the sense of eschatological hope functioned to invigorate or enervate liberation praxis over the years to 1994? Did their expectation of the coming Kingdom of God call the Israelites of Bulhoek to participate in a struggle for liberation and transformation seen as part of the in-breaking of a future world in the present? Or did it help them deal with the pain of its absence by focusing hope exclusively on the future, a coming of Zion much prophesied by Mgijima, in a state of prayerful anticipation characterised by an any-day-now imminence? That the Israelites actively resisted the police order to move from Ntabelanga in 1921, even to the point of death, is a matter of record; their apocalyptic expectation of an imminent *eschaton* fired their determination to remain on the land they called Zion, constrained by the call of God to stand their ground.<sup>29</sup> Less clear is how their eschatological understanding of the present has changed in the time since 1921, and how this has affected their praxis. For example, has the delay of that *eschaton* led to a more historically engaged praxis of liberation, or to a stronger sense of the penultimacy of all human effort in anticipation of the Reign of God on earth? Could it be a case of both/and?

An indication of the direction in which answers to these questions might be found emerged during the proceedings of a commemorative service on 21 May 1992 at Ntabelanga, the 'Mountain of the Dawn' and site of the Bulhoek massacre. When Bishop Mzilana of East London looked out over Ntabelanga he declared memorably, 'Today, as I look at Ntabelanga, I see Golgotha.'<sup>30</sup> Was Bishop Mzilana dealing in metaphor, or was he employing a hermeneutic

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Robert Edgar, *Because they Chose the Plan of God*, History Workshop Series, No. 1, Johannesburg, 1988.

<sup>30</sup> Bishop Mzilana, quoted from notes made during his speech at the commemoration of Ntabelanga (Bulhoek) Massacre, 24 May, 1992. The full name of the church established by the Prophet Mgijima is: The Church of God and Saints of Christ (Israelites), which hosted the commemoration, together with the African Spiritual Churches Association. The inscription on one of the mass graves emphasises the theological nature of the land struggle of the Israelites: 'Because they chose the plan of God, so the world did not have a place for them.' Speaking elsewhere of the massacre, Z.K. Matthews has said, 'The Bulhoek massacre ... is talked about to children as an incident that has passed into what we might call the political history of the people.' Fleshing this out, Nelson Mandela has said, 'South Africa is known throughout the world as a country where the most fierce forms of colour discrimination are practised, and where peaceful struggles of the African people for freedom are



that is more immediate, physically and spiritually, in its identification of the massacre of Prophet Mgijima's Israelites with the crucifixion of Christ on the cross? As he stood in front of the mass grave of those cut down by the maxim guns of Jan Smuts on 24 May, 1921, Bishop Mzilana observed grimly that the killing and 'graving' of his people had continued apace into the early 1990s, an anguished observation that points to the likelihood that Mzilana was employing a hermeneutic beyond metaphor in its *immediacy* of connection between interpreter and tradition. Bishop Mzilana's hermeneutic makes connections across time between Golgotha, the mass grave dug in 1921 at Ntabelanga, and freshly-dug graves all over South Africa in the early 1990s. The participative nature of anamnesis and anamnestic solidarity is very much to the fore. It is a hermeneutic which may be seen to follow a relational pathway of suffering, drawing on the *memoria passionis* of the community and thus in touch with a formative aspect of the community's identity. The biblical tradition of suffering, struggle and sacrifice is identified with by the Israelites of Ntabelanga because it has become part of them, even as they see themselves as having become part of it.

What do we make of such participatory relationality in biblical hermeneutics on the ground? How do we name it? What role does critique play in it? What is said of the role of the Holy Spirit in it? What is its relation to the praxis of the community? What was strikingly clear throughout the course of the commemoration was the falseness of the stereotype that Independent Churches like the Church of God and Saints of Christ (Israelites) were engaged solely in a form of religious escapism. Bishop Mzilana himself put a fine point on the relation between prayer and praxis in the community when he said: 'I agree that nothing can be done without prayer. But after having prayed we must go out and fight for our rights ... The one who only prays is like a coward who arms himself and then does not go out and fight!' As for the use of the bible by whites in an effort to subdue black resistance, Bishop Mzilana castigated their hypocrisy as being both lethal and dispossessive, 'They told us the verse, "Thou shalt not kill," and then they killed and stole and usurped!'<sup>31</sup>

What then may we say concerning the relation between anamnesis, prolepsis, eschatology and praxis in the relational hermeneutics of the Israelite community at Queenstown in the Eastern Cape? First, the hermeneutics looks both backwards and forwards: backwards in anamnestic participation in the *memoria passionis* of the biblical community and forwards in

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violently suppressed. It is a country torn from top to bottom by fierce racial strife and where the blood of African patriots frequently flows. Almost every African household in South Africa knows about the massacre of our people at Bulhoek in the Queenstown district where detachments of the army and police, armed with artillery, machine guns, and rifles, opened fire on unarmed Africans' (in Edgar 1988).

<sup>31</sup>Bishop Mzilana, *ibid.*

active anticipation of the Reign of God on earth, engaging in both the suffering and celebration of biblical communities. Second, the spirituality of the community is one which prayerfully embraces and seeks to participate in the transformative work of God in their history, yet does so with a critical consciousness of the penultimacy (indeed, the antepenultimacy) of human efforts to bring or approximate, or even rightly to interpret, the Reign of God on earth. Third, a context of transition, wherein the already-but-not-yet of the new has begun to stretch the hope inherent in popular expectation, in a way not unlike the eschatological crisis occasioned in the early church by the delay of the *parousia*, may be seen to present a strong challenge to the hermeneutics and praxis of liberation and transformation. The subjectivity of transition requires a revolutionary patience (Sölle, 1984; C. West 1989a), a prophetic pragmatism (C. West, 1989), a deconstructive suspicion coupled with a reconstructive affirmation, on the way to the realisation of the potentialities of the new in the midst of the contingency effected by the ongoing influence of the old. It is the difference between a 'realised eschatology' on the one hand, characterised by an insufficient awareness of the penultimacy of human efforts, and what we may call on the other hand a transformative eschatology, characterised by action in hope (Bosch 1990, 1991), wherein both consciousness and structures are being transformed in the already-but-not-yet of the transition, understood as a *kairos* (Botman 1994).

### 5.3.2 Driefontein, the Apartheid State and Naboth's Vineyard

The struggle, ultimately successful, of the Driefontein community to resist its forced removal in the early 1980s employed a liberative reading of Naboth's Vineyard (1 Kings 21), wherein the community likened the attempt of the apartheid state forcibly to remove people from their land to the violent seizure of Naboth's ancestral land by King Ahab.<sup>32</sup> The relevance

<sup>32</sup> The story of Naboth's vineyard has been appealed to by many communities facing dispossession in diverse contexts throughout the centuries. In a northern context, for example, the 'highland clearances' of the 19th century in Scotland were seen by at least one contemporary observer in terms of the dispossession of Naboth by Ahab. Thomas Mulock, writing in the Inverness Advertiser in 1849, accused Lord Macdonald of seeking to replace the people of Sollas, North Uist, with sheep, and of hiding behind his agents in the process: 'Sollas was foredoomed in order that the district should be partitioned among two or three prospective tacksmen who had found favour with your Lordship's functionaries. The old disposition of Naboth's vineyard is renewed on a larger scale by the Celtic Ahabs' (quoted in John Prebble, *The Highland Clearances*, 1963, p.254). This example is chosen partly because it was to Canada that Macdonald had proposed to remove 'the race of Colla,' and because somewhat earlier in the period of the clearances my maternal ancestors, the MacAulays, had been forced to leave their home in Illery, North Uist - sailing from Lochmaddy to Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in July of 1829. See also Donald Meek, "'The Land Question Answered from the Bible': The Land Issue and the Development of a Highland Theology of Liberation," *The Scottish Geographical Magazine* 103:2, September 1987, pp.84-89. Meek's argument, outlined in various publications in recent years, is that in the Scottish Highlands of the nineteenth century the bible became an influential book in the struggle of the poor and landless against social oppression. 'The application of the bible in this manner,' says Meek, 'foreshadows the development of liberation theology in present-day Latin America and South Africa' (Meek 1988:187).

of the Naboth story for Driefontein was rejected by the then Minister of Co-operation and Development Aid, Piet Koornhof, in a meeting in Pretoria in 1983. Interrupting Shadrack Mkhize, who had but mentioned Naboth's name, Koornhof declared that he also knew the story of Naboth's vineyard and that he would have nothing to do with the Driefontein case if it was a Naboth-Ahab scenario. Predictably, he counselled the people of Driefontein to accept the removal as God's will, however unpleasant. With duplicitous self-disclosure, would-be empathy and a logic known only to himself, Koornhof declared:

The Israelites did not want to leave Egypt, they had to cross the Red Sea. We've all got to move sometimes - let us do it in as pleasant a way as possible, and take each others' hands, and accommodate each other in every way we can. I was born in Leeudoringstad in the Western Transvaal. I love that place better than any other. But I live as a nomad. I spend six months in Pretoria, six months in Cape Town. I don't know where I live. I don't even live in my own home. But I don't cry about it ... Clearly there is some suspicion and confusion. I hope we have cleared it up tonight. I want you to return with happiness in your hearts if possible.<sup>33</sup>

Shadrack Mkhize, however, reminded the Minister that his brother Saul Mkhize, the leader of the community's resistance, had recently been murdered at an anti-removal meeting by a white policeman who had subsequently been acquitted of the homicide, even though there were many witnesses and an international outcry. There were thus two points of contact with the Naboth story asserted Shadrack: murder and dispossession. The relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering and struggle may again be seen to have played a primary role in the dynamics of the interpretive work of the community. The following excerpt documents the God-talk and biblical hermeneutics on both sides:

**Shadrack Mkhize:** I thank you for what you've said and for what you people have decided. But amongst the people sitting around - The people of Driefontein deny and refuse to be moved. let God be our judge. Yes we are powerless, we haven't the power to speak and do what we want. If God is a true man let him buy (redeem) this hour and know that we have refused to move from Driefontein. For we truly believe in God, the creator of everything, he placed us in Driefontein. In 1903 our forefathers found this place. There were arguments from 1907 until 1912 when there was agreement that we are belonging in this place. and the Governor General signed that we should belong in Driefontein for generations. All people

<sup>33</sup> See the minutes of the meeting of the Driefontein Council Board of Directors (the representative body of those resisting the removal) and the Driefontein Community Board (under the leadership of Mr Msibi, co-operating with the removal), with Dr P.G. Koornhof (Minister of Co-operation and Development), Mr Van Der Walt (Deputy Minister), Mr Le Roux (Chairman of the Commission for Co-operation and Development), Mr Raath (Director General), Mr van Niekerk (Chief Commissioner for Northern Areas), Mr Prinsloo (the Waakerstroom Commissioner), Brigadier Visser of the South African Police, 'a substantial number of other officials,' and Mr Geoff Budlender of the Legal Resource Centre, the Council Board of Directors' (resistors) lawyer, in Pretoria on 30 May, 1983, unpublished (personal copy). Budlender, who took the minutes (unofficially), marked them, 'Confidential: Not for Distribution or Publication' at the time. His minutes have since been quoted in a paper by Aninka Claassens, now his wife, and thus the embargo on publication is taken as having been lifted. See Aninka Claassens, 'Rural Land Struggles in the Transvaal in the 1980s,' in Christine Murray and Catherine O'Regan, eds., *No Place to Rest: Forced Removals and the Law in South Africa*, Cape Town, 1990, pp.27-65.



believe God is there, let him be the judge.

**Piet Koornhof:** I respect what you say, I respect very highly what you say. I am also a great believer in God. It's true that God knows what is best for us. God has placed on you and me responsibilities. He has given us a head to think with, he has told us you must not kick against the tentacles. I am here also a believer in God, discussing a very complicated issue with you. There is the highest authority - his will is that such authority be instituted. He teaches us to obey authority, and teaches authority to obey his words, not to place a yoke on the people which they can't bear. We know that the dam has to be, in the interests on everybody. I am going extremely out of my way to meet your principles as best I can, to bring the two factions together, to restore peace, to give you and your children a better future. If you think it's God's will that fighting should continue, and that more lives should be taken in the process - But I think it's not God's will. We must try to co-operate.

**Shadrack Mkhize:** I have read the bible and I know it well, the Old Testament and the New Testament. And in Kings we read the story of a man named Naboth -

**Piet Koornhof** (interjecting): This is not at stake! This is not the case of Naboth's Vineyard! I know the story of Naboth's Vineyard. If it was such a case, I wouldn't want anything to do with it.

**Shadrack Mkhize:** I was born in Driefontein and brought up in Sophiatown. Driefontein is what we want.

**Piet Koornhof:** God's will is not always what we want and what we can. (He refers to the bloodshed in Driefontein.)

**Shadrack Mkhize:** There was no bloodshed in Driefontein. What happened is that an outsider, someone from outside Driefontein, shot our brother.<sup>34</sup>

Shadrack Mkhize may be seen to have followed a classic strategy of appealing beyond an earthly authority to the Higher Authority of God.<sup>35</sup> 'All people believe in God,' asserts Mkhize, 'Let him be the judge.' Mkhize's 'all people' is shrewdly inclusive of Koornhof and the National Party: all are subject to the judgement of God. Koornhof's reply acknowledges this Higher Authority, but seeks to bring it down to earth - specifically into the hands of the apartheid state. 'Yes there is that highest authority,' he agrees, but 'his will is that such authority be instituted.' Thus he advises Shadrack, 'He has told us you must not kick against the tentacles.' In this context 'kicking against the tentacles' can only refer to the resistance of the community to the proposed forced removal. It is at this point that Shadrack, not about to concede defeat, brings the bible into play. His choice of the Naboth story is spiritually and strategically decisive: the 'institution' argument of Koornhof can be made to work against him, for it is not merely a question of the thatness of an earthly institution of Higher Authority, but a question of the obedience, or in the case of Ahab and the apartheid state the disobedience, of the earthly authority to that Higher Authority. Thus Shadrack has

<sup>34</sup> Minutes, *ibid.*, pp.16-17. Desmond Tutu, commenting in 1981 on the 'reformist rhetoric' of the government of P.W. Botha, observes with characteristic wit, 'Apartheid, we were told by Dr Koornhof, is dead. Sadly we have not been invited to the funeral nor have we seen the corpse. Nothing short of moves towards dismantling apartheid will bring true security and peace to this land' (Tutu 1983: 81).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Walter Brueggemann's socio-literary reading of Psalms 9 and 10, 'Psalms 9-10: A Counter to Conventional Social Reality,' in the recent *feestschrift* for Norman Gottwald, *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis*, edited by D. Jobling, P. Day and G. Sheppard, Cleveland, 1991, pp.3-15.



only to mention the name 'Naboth' and Koornhof gets the message. Shadrack no sooner speaks Naboth's name, obviously prepared to elaborate, than Koornhof is stung into interjecting his objection. 'That is not at stake!' he declares. 'This is not the case of Naboth's Vineyard!' His objection rings hollow, however, when, having again and with less art sought to counsel Shadrack theologically to submit to his interpretation of what the Higher Authority wants (i.e. the relocation) and does not want (i.e. bloodshed in Driefontein), Shadrack reminds him that the bloodshed was brought into Driefontein from the outside - the 'outsider' being an officer of the state police. Thus the appeal to the Naboth/Ahab story stands its ground: it is a case of both murder and dispossession, effected by the state against a landowner well within his religio-cultural and historical-legal rights.

In the end the state did indeed 'want nothing to do with' the case of Driefontein. The community, assisted by organisations like the Legal Resource Centre, the Black Sash and the SACC within South Africa, and by allies in the international anti-apartheid movement, were able successfully to resist their removal. They were formally reprieved from forced removal, together with the neighbouring community of kwaNgema, on 27 August 1985 (Claassens 1990:37-39).

So far in this account the conflict of hermeneutics between Mkhize and Koornhof is a familiar one: the liberation hermeneutics of the oppressed, exercising their epistemological privilege, confronts the authoritarian hermeneutics of the apartheid state. It is the kind of interpretive conflict that lies behind the analysis of the *Kairos Document*, wherein the oppression/liberation axis of prophetic theology confronts the authority/obedience axis of state theology in the name of the God of the Exodus and the Christ of the cross. It was only when this theological confrontation was remembered ten years later during a community workshop concerning women and land in Driefontein that a further dynamic was uncovered. As the interview turned to biblical traditions which have played a role in the community's land struggles, Jane Kumalo, one of the workshop's translators, said, 'Baba Shadrack is called Naboth to this day!' Everyone present enjoyed this, remembering and celebrating Baba Shadrack's theological victory, and looking around to see if he could be found and introduced as such.<sup>36</sup> What do we make of the immediacy and personality of the hermeneutics involved? That the Naboth story was interpreted and appropriated as part of the Driefontein resistance to

<sup>36</sup> Jane Kumalo, Women and Land Workshop, Driefontein, South-Eastern Transvaal, 25 August, 1994, p17. While Shadrack was absent on the day, Mam Beauty Mkhize, President of the Rural Women's Movement and the widow of Saul Mkhize, was present and participating, having organised the workshop.

the dispossessive efforts of the apartheid state is clear, what is less clear is how the relational dynamics of identification, engagement and participation work within that hermeneutic.

To begin with a basic observation: the Driefontein hermeneutic is Black and African in the first instance precisely because Saul, Beauty and Shadrack Mkhize are Black and African. That is, the identity of the interpreters, 'who we are,' is central in the hermeneutic. It is a hermeneutic concerning which the *who questions* must be asked at the beginning, in the middle and at the end. It is a hermeneutic that is personal, participatory and relational before it is ideological, and is ideological within the context of the life of the community on the land.

Further, an appreciation of ancestral hermeneutics, both African and biblical, as introduced in chapter two, is instructive, for it helps us enter into the trans-generational relationality involved, and signals the importance of the graves of loved ones as a *locus theologicus* and as a site of struggle. Aninka Claassens, in a carefully observed account, foregrounds the combative spirituality and strategy of the people of Driefontein with respect to the graves and the persons of Saul and Beauty Mkhize:

At one meeting Mrs Mkhize told the presiding officer that he should come with her and she would show him where she had dug her grave, next to her husband's. Then, when he came back to remove them, he should just shoot her so she could fall in neatly. There was a big pile of sand so he could cover her up with minimum effort.

The common refrain used to taunt officials was this: 'Don't worry we're prepared to move. You just bring Saul Mkhize back to life and then we'll follow him out of here. But as long as he is in the ground here, we're staying here.'<sup>37</sup>

As above with Bishop Mzilana's relation of Ntabelanga to Golgotha, the relation of Driefontein to Naboth's Vineyard, and of the apartheid state to Ahab, is *immediate* and personal. It is a relationality with specific names and (auto)biographies: for example those of Saul, Beauty and Shadrack Mkhize, and Piet Koornhof, Brigadier Visser and P.W. Botha. It is a relationality in which the interpreters participate in that which is interpreted and are in turn participated-in in the hermeneutical event. In this, the hermeneutical pathways of suffering and struggle are again central, enabling the people of Driefontein to relate themselves and their story to the story of Naboth and Ahab. Following the language of Stephen Crites (1971), we may say that for Driefontein the story of their resistance is a 'sacred narrative,' evocative of consciousness, both in its relation to the biblical narrative of Naboth's vineyard and as a story of community survival and identity, involving the God-assisted retention of the land of their ancestors through a sacrificial resistance to the dispossessive efforts of an unjust state.

<sup>37</sup> Reported in Aninka Claassens, op cit., p.35.

### 5.3.3 The Barolong and Good Friday; Sharpeville and Amritsar

Examples abound, cases multiply. What do we make of the Barolong community's identification with the crucifixion of Christ, when, on Good Friday 1992, the community was arrested for 'trespassing' on their ancestral land at Matlwang? As discussed in chapter two, the exact hour of Christ's crucifixion is identified both liturgically and chronologically, and is then related to the hour of the arrest of the Barolong. 'We, on our end,' testifies Mrs Mogotsi, 'were anticipating the crucifixion of Jesus Christ at 3 o'clock. Instead, at 3 o'clock we were praying for the people who were by now in jail!'

As I listened to Mrs Mogotsi make the linkage between the time of the crucifixion and the time of the arrest I was reminded of a similar identification made during a screening of the film *Gandhi* at the Transformation Resource Centre in Maseru, Lesotho, in 1986. The audience was a group of political exiles from South Africa. As the scenes of the massacre at Amritsar were shown, one of the men exclaimed, '*Ke Sharpeville! Ke Sharpeville!*' 'It is Sharpeville! It is Sharpeville!' He does not say the massacre at Amritsar, as portrayed in the film, is *like (ke joale ka)* the massacre at Sharpeville in 1960, he says *it is (ke)* Sharpeville. The correspondence is immediate and vital for him, and gripped his whole body in a clench of participation in the pain and outrage of the massacre(s). That the massacre at Sharpeville had happened twenty-six years earlier, and that the massacre at Amritsar was farther back in time, had happened on another continent and was made present through the medium of a video tape of a cinematic film, seemed not to affect the immediacy of the relationality at work. Again, the relational pathway of suffering, or, to be more specific, of being made to suffer at the hands of an oppressor who has created an unjust and lethal context for the life of your people, is a central dynamic in the hermeneutic.

### 5.3.4 Participative Relationality in Biblical Hermeneutics: An Interim Conclusion

That relationality, arguably the central dynamic of life in Africa, is a determinative aspect of consciousness in local biblical hermeneutics is hardly surprising; how the relationality plays itself out in the hermeneutics is not as clear. Can we speak, for example, of a relational rationality in the transpiration of meaning, involving personal engagement and participation with a wide embrace of actors, including the Holy Spirit, biblical actors, the spirits of the ancestors, the members of one's family, community and society, and the land itself? The personal engagement on the part of the interpreter(s) in that which is interpreted is both individual and communal, and happens through shared narratives and traditions: Black

African and biblical. The relational hermeneutical pathways of suffering, struggle and celebration feature centrally in the engagement - the recognition of shared suffering, struggle and celebration triggering and facilitating inter-community engagement and participation. Socio-economic and political analysis is done within the context of this inclusive, multivalent relationality.

The importance of physicality, of the relationship between touch and knowing, must not be undervalued in local biblical hermeneutics and may be seen as providing a third consideration in what to date has been a dialogue between textuality and orality in local hermeneutics. With respect to the hermeneutical event, there is a vast difference between, for example, a group of women farmers with their babies on their backs or at their breasts, sitting in a circle in a rice field, considering their interpretation of the story, related orally, of Zelophehad's daughters receiving his land allocation in the absence of sons,<sup>38</sup> and a group of women sitting around a table in an office building in the city, their sons and daughters left at home with other women, as they consider the text of Numbers 27.<sup>39</sup> Further, the very touching of the text, the holding of a bible in the hands, can be a significant event in the hermeneutics. What can the physical texture of the text tell us? Is the bible as book strange to the touch or familiar? What degree of distancing, and what kind, is represented by the bible as text in the hands of someone who cannot read it? To what extent does the oral communication of biblical text overcome this distancing and facilitate participation in what would then, by definition, be a communal hermeneutic? How do these dynamics affect the transmissive distancing (from language to speech and from speech to text) and hermeneutical mediations (from text to reading), involved in the process of interpretation (Althaus-Reid 1993: 219)? At the very least, the strangeness-to-the-touch, the otherness, of the bible as text in the hands of one who cannot read it points to the need to extend the distancing/mediation argument to include a mediation from the silent reading of the text by an individual to the oral reading and oral hearing of the text, involving of necessity at least two persons. Thus a triologue of considerations may be said to at work, characterised as textual, oral and physical, wherein 'physical' signals the importance of touch for knowing within the relational rationality at work.

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<sup>38</sup> The reference is to a Group Interview with Women Farmers of the Zoeknog Rice Project, In Rice Fields, Zoeknog Farm, Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, unpublished, 19 May, 1994.

<sup>39</sup> See discussion of Numbers 27 in chapter on women's hermeneutics.



#### **5.4 Concluding Summary: Criticality and Relationality in Grounded Biblical Hermeneutics**

In our consideration of the historical and methodological interpretive crises facing a grounded biblical hermeneutics of liberation and transformation in South Africa we have argued that the criticality of this hermeneutics must be seen in the context of its relationality. The 'incomprehensible paradox' with which we began was seen to give way to an interactive hermeneutical event wherein the ideological critique of both interpreter and text is practised as part of a participative relationality in which the liberative and transformative capacity of the interpreters and the biblical texts they interpret is realised through a critical and creative engagement, entered into in the power of the Holy Spirit, following the relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering, struggle and celebration. The relational hermeneutical dynamic enables an inter-communal engagement across the text/interpreter distancing. This hermeneutics foregrounds the role of relationality in rationality, wherein meaning may be said to transpire (Boff 1987; Schneiders 1989) in the interactive engagement of a wide embrace of actors, whose reciprocal participation locates the interpretive event in the personal and communal. That is, while the two are indeed reciprocally related, the criticality of grounded hermeneutics occurs in the context of its relationality. In this relationality the importance of physicality, of the texture of the text in the hands of the interpreter, must not be undervalued, and we may thus speak of a triad of textuality, orality and physicality in local hermeneutics, in which the foreign feel of the text is massaged by the tones and kinesics of a reader lifting the text orally from the page to the interpreters.

A grounded biblical hermeneutics of land restitution employs both suspicion and affirmation, engages in both deconstruction and reconstruction, and is marked by a critical and conditional convergence of the concerns of Black, African, Prophetic and Womanist biblical hermeneutics. This convergence is rooted in the land itself, and in the concomitant multivalent integrality of the struggle for ancestral land, conjoining religio-cultural with historical-legal, socio-economic and political analyses and strategies. At the same time, the interpretation and appropriation of biblical texts and traditions in local struggles for land restitution expresses itself in its own terms, terms which are grounded in the language and experience of those who voice them - the 'ordinary interpreters.' They may not be co-opted by a theological elite into a homologised hermeneutics of restitution, reconstruction and development. Grounded hermeneutics thus issues a call to dialogue, multi-lingual and multivalent, between and among professional, pastoral and lay theologians, urban and rural, with implications for biblical studies, theological ethics and the praxis of transformation in the new South Africa. In such a

dialogue elites of all disciplines will have to work hard to hear the voice of local discourse, developing new cultural-linguistic skills along the way - the myth of 'voicelessness' having been discarded.

The chapter that follows considers the biblical hermeneutics of three of the TLRC communities (the Moletete, Dinkwanyane and Leroro) interviewed during the *kairos* of the Back to the Land Campaign, as rural land-less communities sought to take advantage of the run-up to the April 1994 elections and the victory of Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress therein.

## CHAPTER 6

### Biblical Hermeneutics in Local Struggles for Land Restitution II: Texts in Community

Jeremiah is a witness to our sufferings.

Petrus Makhubedu, Moletele

That man first made from the soil must have been a white man ... Adam was white, because the whites have all the land!

Nathan Modipa, Dinkwanyane

Moses was used by God to relieve the Israelites who were surprised and burdened by another nation, Egypt. They had been punished a long time and they were suffering. For 400 years! But at last they reached their goal. Like ourselves - the holy scriptures are taking place.

Dikeledi Mashego, Leroro

A man, Zaccheu, ran and clambered over a tree because he heard that Jesus Christ was coming. When Jesus Christ came he went through the crowd and said to him, 'Clamber off! Come down! Because today I am your visitor.' Zaccheu clambered down off the tree. Some people were hurt and some people were happy. But he repented and gave back what he had taken.

Hildah Makogane, Leroro

This chapter furthers our consideration of the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities, documenting the interpretations of self-selected texts among the Moletele, Dinkwanyane and Leroro communities in the months preceding and following the April 1994 elections. While the significance of this historic moment, indeed a *kairos*, in the long struggle against apartheid greatly affected the interpreters and their interpretations, the relevance of the elections for the campaign for land restitution was seen to be but a partial one. The communities, seeking to retain the initiative in their irruption, looked to their own strengths and strategies and to allies in civil society as much as to the elections for their break-through - having committed themselves to being back on their land before the elections. Further, making linkages between their *borapedi* and praxis, the communities looked to God to empower them. The role of the bible as a medium of God's empowerment of the communities was given a searching and in many ways eloquent and moving witness. Whether in thanksgiving to God for what had come to pass or in ongoing anguish over what had not, in celebration of the birth of

the new or in suspicion of the ongoing power of the old, the interpretations voiced in the communities were animated and integrally related to their struggles for land and life. There was prayer at the beginning and end of sessions, much laughter, some singing, sometimes dance, sometimes debate, sometimes applause, sometimes ridicule, and a commitment to hearing the text and each other in a cultural practice of mutual respect - though it must be noted that with respect to the issue of women and land a path had to be cleared in some cases for a hearing of what the women who were present had to say.

What we may call a local lectionary of land restitution included some unexpected textual choices (e.g. crossing the Kidron to Gethsemane) together with older stand-bys (e.g. Nehemiah returning from exile to rebuild Jerusalem); some extraordinary interpretations (Adam, taken from the soil, must have been a white man, because whites have all the land) together with some widely-voiced interpretations (the God of the exodus, moved to active compassion by the suffering of the Israelites in Egypt, is at work to liberate black South Africans from the legacies of apartheid). We will begin with the Moletele community, following them from a pre-return stage of preparation in February 1994, during which the bible 'witnessed to (their) suffering' and helped them envision their return to 'the city of (their) ancestors' graves,' to their attempted return in May 1994, when the bible 'compelled and exhorted' their vanguard, and indeed became a relational medium of the sacrificial presence of Jesus with them as they crossed the Blyde River. We will then stand back somewhat to look at the contrasting approaches to the biblical text in the Dinkwanyane and Leroro communities of the Mpumalanga Highveld, the former marked by a hermeneutics of suspicion of the text as a white production and cultural weapon, the latter by a hermeneutics of affirmation of the text as an empowering medium of the liberating and transformative Word of God.

### **6.1 The Moletele: Lamentation and Return 'Across the Kidron'**

The textual choices and interpretations of the Moletele made before and during their return to the Blyde River Canyon offer us an excellent window on local biblical hermeneutics in rural land struggles. In the February 1994 interview, the elders cite both the Lamentations of Jeremiah and the return of Nehemiah to Jerusalem, comprising together 'a witness to our sufferings' and a witness to the pending success of the struggle to return to 'the city of our ancestors' graves' to rebuild it. Three months later in the interview with the vanguard, one day following their return to the Blyde River Canyon, it was a participative identification with the crossing of the River Kidron by Jesus and his disciples *en route* to Gethsemane to pray and, in



the event, be arrested that received the most searching treatment. Following the relational pathways of shared suffering and struggle, and making an explicit linkage between hermeneutics and praxis, the biblical interpretations articulated may be seen to be ancestral, liberative and transformative:

**Q:** I can see that the ancestors play a large role in your theology of the land. Does the Bible play a role in your theology? Or in your struggle to get your land back?

**Barnas Mashego:** Are you asking if the religion of the Bible can play an important role in our struggle for our land, as do the ancestors?

**Q:** Yes.

**Petrus Makhubedu:** Yes, there is a hope that Christianity can play an important role. Look at the Lamentations of Jeremiah, for example - chapter five. Jeremiah says: our inheritance has been taken by strangers. We have been taken from our ancestral land and made to be slaves in a new land. After becoming their slaves, Jeremiah cried to God, saying: we have been forcibly removed from our ancestral land and now we are staying here, made to be slaves. Should we now ask the rulers of this land to release us and give us our land back, and our vineyards to work as our own? As it is now - everything we get we get through begging. Even food. We have to pay even for water. That is the lamentation of Jeremiah. We find ourselves having these same problems as in Jeremiah's time. Removal. Enslavement. Having to beg for everything. Taxes on everything. Jeremiah is a witness to our sufferings.

**Elphas Thete:** I can think of the book of Nehemiah. After the sufferings and lamentations of Jeremiah, we have the return of Israel to their land. They returned from Babylon and began to rebuild Jerusalem. They call it, 'the city of my ancestors' graves', and they are very keen to rebuild it [see chapter 2:3-5].

**Q:** 'The city of my ancestors' graves'?

**Elphas Thete:** Yes. That is what they call Jerusalem. That is what I remember.

**Q:** Are you a minister that you remember such detail?

**Elphas Thete:** Yes (laughing). I am a minister in the Apostolic Church.

**Q:** Now I understand. Listening to what you have told me - it seems that you are making a correlation between Jeremiah's Lamentations and your removal in 1965, and then a second correlation between the return to Jerusalem in Nehemiah and your struggle to return to your ancestral land in the Blyde River Canyon and start over in 1994.

**Elphas Thete:** Yes. Those are the links we make.

**Q:** The two passages you have mentioned deal with the whole struggle, from removal to return and rebuilding.

**Barnas Mashego:** In this way: people should not be surprised that those who are now in control of everything will be overthrown, and those who are oppressed now will rule over them. They will be given power to do this.

**Q:** By God?

**Barnas Mashego:** Yes, empowered by God. That is what we believe.

**Elphas Thete:** We are already seeing it.

**Q:** Are you referring to the elections process?

**Elphas Thete:** The elections are only part of it.

**Barnas Mashego:** The elections can help us. But we are not relying only on the elections. We ourselves must be empowered to return to our land. We have agreed, many of our communities, that we want to be back on our land before the elections.

**Q:** Can we talk about your strategies for land restoration before the elections? Some say negotiate. Others say re-occupy. Others say do both. What do you say?

**Barnas Mashego:** The re-occupation by force approach to our land is too dangerous, because of the whites who live there now. We could easily be shot. So, the strategy is to identify state-owned lands. We want to occupy those lands by force. Then negotiations could continue, after we have occupied the state land. That is, we have targeted those parts

of our ancestral lands which are now in state hands. Thereafter, we will carry on with negotiations with the Department of Regional and Land Affairs (DRLA). Then we will tell our ancestors of the re-occupation.

**Q:** You say that you want to go back before the elections?

**Barnas Mashego:** We do not want to wait until after the elections. It was under the current government that we were forcibly removed and they should have to deal with our re-occupation - not the new government after elections. We will secure access through negotiations.

**Q:** Is that where the Transvaal Land Restoration Committee (TLRC) comes in? Together with TRAC and your lawyers. Negotiations with the DRLA?

**Barnas Mashego:** Yes. The negotiations are necessary because of the violence of the white farmers and their back-ups. For example, in Hoedspruit two black policemen have been shot by white farmers. They were suspected of trying to rob the whites. But I think the allegations are false - the two cops are being scapegoated. Also, two black youths were beaten by white farmers. So we have a clear idea about the violence of these whites. The white farmers' gates are always closed. Each time you go there you find those gates locked. They are developing their security - building six-meter fences. Where they get the money we don't know.<sup>1</sup>

From Makhubedu's 'witness to our sufferings,' to Thete's return to the 'city of our ancestors' graves,' to Mashego's 'people should not be surprised that those who are now in control of everything will be overthrown, and those who are oppressed now will rule over them,' the relational pathways of shared suffering, struggle and (anticipated) celebration may be seen to be at work in the biblical hermeneutics of the Moletete. The themes of active compassion, ancestral solidarity and socio-political reversal may be discerned in a biblical hermeneutics that is at once ancestral, liberative and transformative. It is in light of the correlations made between Lamentations and removal, and Nehemiah and return and rebuilding, that Barnas Mashego states that 'people should not be surprised' when they see the oppressed of South Africa rise up to rule their oppressors. It is 'in this way' that the biblical hermeneutics of Makhubedu and Thete are translated by Mashego into political and strategic terms. The theme of empowerment for political liberation and land restitution is related to the faith of the Moletete in a God who has suffered with them through the years of their dispossession and exile in Acornhoek and their long struggle to return to the Blyde River Canyon. The elections process, seen to be of help, is not relied upon exclusively. Significantly for a grounded theology of land restitution, it is the locally-based strategies of re-occupation and negotiation that are relied upon more heavily. In this way the ownership of the struggle for land restitution is retained in the hands of the communities themselves, while at the same time allowing for strategic political, legal and spiritual linkages with political parties and organisations in civil society. The dual strategy of, on the one hand, threatening re-occupation of 'targeted land' (i.e. land still in state, and not private, hands: e.g. the Blyde River Canyon

<sup>1</sup> Moletete Interview, 3 February, 1994, unpublished, pp.6-8.

Nature Reserve) and, on the other, negotiations with the DRLA because of the manifest violence of local white farmers, is itself characteristic of the prophetically pragmatic approach to strategy at the local level.

It is useful at this point to recall Itumeleng Mosala's observation that the 'Nehemiah project' is as much about 'foreign sponsorship' (that of Artaxerxes) as about Nehemiah's own initiative. Through the eyes of the Moletele it looks less like 'sponsorship' and more like a strategic exploitation of that which may be gained from an ambiguous political power (the Persian Kingship; the Department of Regional and Land Affairs in its last days) over against a more openly hostile and proximate threat (Sanballat, Tobiah, Geshem and associates; local white farmers). While Mosala's observation and warning continues to be relevant seven years into the transition period, it must be heard in conjunction with the hermeneutical and practical efforts of local communities like the Moletele, who read the signs of the times with a tenacious faith and a strategic edge that finds a way home through the most contradictory of contexts. Even the challenge to Nehemiah's project from the *inside*, wherein the cries of the poor of the land are made against the dispossessive, rapacious and enslaving practice of returned Jewish nobles and officials, is dealt with in favour of the poor. Nehemiah champions the cause of the poor and dispossessed over against the nobles and his own officials, ordering an end to the taking of interest and proclaiming the restitution of land, vineyards, orchards, houses, and the interest charged to date.<sup>2</sup> While it may be noted that Nehemiah, as Governor under Artaxerxes, seems very much to have retained editorial control over the text,<sup>3</sup> it must also be noted that the

<sup>2</sup> The text of Nehemiah 5:1-13 reads as follows: 'Now there was a great outcry of the people and of their wives against their Jewish kin. For there were those who said, "With our sons and our daughters, we are many; we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive." There were also those who said, "We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine." And there were those who said, "We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king's tax. Now our flesh is the same as that of our kindred; our children are the same as their children; and yet we are forcing our sons and daughters to be slaves, and some of our daughters have been ravished; we are powerless, and our fields and vineyards now belong to others." I was very angry when I heard their outcry and these complaints. After thinking it over, I brought charges against the nobles and the officials; I said to them, "You are all taking interest from your own people." And I called a great assembly to deal with them, and said to them, "As far as we were able, we have bought back our Jewish kindred who had been sold to other nations; but now you are selling your own kin, who must then be bought back by us!" They were silent, and could not find a word to say. So I said, "The thing that you are doing is not good. Should you not walk in the fear of our God, to prevent the taunts of the nations our enemies? Moreover I and my brothers and my servants are lending them money and grain. Let us stop this taking of interest. Restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them." Then they said, "We will restore everything and demand nothing more from them. We will do as you say." And I called the priests, and made them take an oath to do as they had promised. I also shook out the fold of my garment and said, "So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise. Thus may they be shaken out and emptied." And all the assembly said, "Amen," and praised the LORD. And the people did as they had promised' (NRSV).

<sup>3</sup> See 5:14-19. In (self-)praise of Nehemiah, the pericope ends thus, 'Remember for my good, O my God, all that I have done for this people' (NRSV).



cries of the poor and dispossessed are answered in the text in a liberative and just fashion, befitting a chastened Israel. The quick return of its ruling classes to the very injustices that led to their exile is seen to be condemned and reversed in the text. The text of Nehemiah in the hands of the Moletele, or rather the memory related orally of the narrative, receives a liberative treatment not easily brushed aside as naïve or shallow.

In the interview on 20 May with the ten men of the vanguard,<sup>4</sup> one day following their return to the Blyde River Canyon, the participative nature of the relational hermeneutic of the Moletele came into play more dramatically. In crossing the Blyde River to return to their ancestral land, a breath-takingly beautiful landscape of mountains, valleys and rivers, the vanguard saw themselves as crossing the Kidron, as had Jesus and his disciples before his arrest, to pray in Gethsemane. Before the interview itself reached the Kidron, however, Enos Chiloane responded to the question of the role of the bible in the struggle of the Moletele in more general terms, citing with passion a number of texts in the local lectionary of land restitution.<sup>5</sup> A deep respect for the 'holy scriptures', by which 'we are compelled' and apart from which 'we fail to complete the mission of God' is clearly evident:

**Q:** Seeing that many of you are ministers and evangelists, may I ask you what you say today on the subject of God and the land?

**Enos Chiloane:** We are compelled by the holy scriptures. We are compelled by the affairs of God (*ditaba tsa Modimo*). According to the book of Joshua, chapter one, verse one. We are compelled by the book of Esther, chapter one, verse one. We are compelled by the book of Nehemiah, chapter one, verse one. We are compelled by the book of Numbers, chapter 14, verse one to the end. We are compelled by the book of the Lamentations of Jeremiah, chapter five, verse one to the end. These are the passages which are exhorting us, because without them we are unable to pray God, and be blessed with the promises which we come across in these holy scriptures. At the end of the day, we fail to complete the mission of God.

**Q:** Now, if we say that on Sunday it is you who will preach, what will you say in your sermon?

**Enos Chiloane:** If it is me who will preach on Sunday, I must teach the people that they can do everything that comes from the holy scriptures. But they should not trouble God. They must fear God. The wisest way I can teach people is that they must fear God.

Chiloane delivered his 'we are compelled by the holy scriptures' speech with solemn conviction, almost but not quite preaching it. Some of his choices, for example Lamentations

<sup>4</sup> The members of the Moletele vanguard are as follows: Enos Chiloane, Wilfred Chiloane, Petrus Makhubedu, Renius Malatjie, Laitos Malatjie, Abram Molobela, William Morele, Laxon Mahlakoane, Enos Moyema, and Abram Moyeng. Barnas Mashego, chairperson of the Drakensburg Farmers Union, and Cedric Setwane, a member of the Pilgrim's Rest Land Restoration Committee were also present in support of the vanguard, together with Bright Mashego and myself. As it happened the return was short-lived, and the Moletele are still (in September 1996) waiting while the CRLR processes their claim.

<sup>5</sup> Enos Chiloane, who is physically blind, is an evangelist in the Reformed Apostolic Faith Mission, a traditional headman, and leader of the return to the Blyde River Canyon.



5 and Nehemiah, we have seen above in the first interview. The post-exodic 'let us return to the land of Egypt ... not one of you shall see the land which I have promised your ancestors' in Numbers 14, the conquest of the promised land in Joshua, and the salvation of Israel in exile in Esther, present a wide range of concerns in the 'canon within the canon' of the Moletete with respect to land. While the text of Numbers 14 was not widely cited, the theme of obedience to the LORD, and the disaster that may befall a community which turned away from God, was widely acknowledged. The call to confession and conversion was made inside the communities as often as it was made to those outside, and with as sharp an edge. This theme is repeated by Chiloane when he says that the wisest sermon he could preach is that the people must *do* the scriptures, and fear God. The emphasis on doing, and not hearing only, the scriptures is seen to be an essential one if the blessings and promises made in the scriptures are to be experienced by the community. The concern of Chiloane, and of many others (see De Gruchy's qualifications of the 'epistemological privilege of the poor' above), for the internal integrity of the *borapedi* of the community is a significant counter to the charge that the piety and biblical hermeneutics of the communities are exclusively a matter of strategy, and not one of the spirit. As we have seen above, the *memoria passionis* of the communities has much to do with internal division, corruption and betrayal; the call to do the scriptures and to fear God is made with genuine anguish of spirit (was not the Moletete Chief, Abuti Chiloane, working against the return even as Enos spoke?) and knowledge of the need for divine blessing, lest the Moletete fail 'at the end of the day' to complete the mission of God - in particular, fail to return to their ancestral land.

Following a discussion of the role of African ancestral tradition in the return, we returned to the role of the bible and of biblical interpretation. The citing of the crossing of the Kidron (John 18:1) was unprompted and quite unexpected (I initially thought my ears had deceived me, and that the River Jordan was intended), and was raised in response to an observation, pointed in another direction, that the vanguard was comprised of men only:

**Q:** I see that you are all men. Is this your strategy, that you come first to arrange things and the women will then follow?

**All:** Yes, it's that way.

**Q:** So, the women are at home.

**All:** Yes, they are at home.

**Enos Chiloane:** The way it is since our arrival here on Wednesday, we are in a battle. Because we are sleeping in the compound, not as at home but as in a hostel. How will it be if we were with the women? We are packed in like sardines.

**Q:** This is no place right now for women?

**Enos Chiloane:** This is our opportunity only, as men. This is the time now, to go to the river Kidron to pray. Now it is time, we have crossed the river Kidron, now we have got

the time to pray. And we are going to pray being free. We will be free to pray. We have crossed the river Kidron. We have the Lord Jesus with us.

**Q:** Kidron? Am I hearing you correctly? Not the Jordan?

**Enos Chiloane:** The Kidron. We have crossed the river Kidron.

**Barnas Mashego:** We have managed to cross the river Kidron to pray.

**Bright Mashego:** Now that they have crossed the river Kidron they have the chance to pray, at any time, because they have the chance to do so. Also, they are close to their ancestral graves.

**Enos Chiloane:** When Jesus Christ was about to be crucified he was taken to the cross, he then went and called all his disciples to follow him. He crossed the river Kidron and went to the garden of Gethsemane, and knelt down and prayed. Now, with us, it is our time.

**Q:** He said, 'My father, if this cup can pass from me ... But not my will, your will be done.'

**All:** Yes! That's it! That is his prayer!

**Q:** So, you say it is your time now. You don't know what will happen here. But you have followed him across the Kidron to pray. To this place. With your cross.

**Laitos Malatjie:** Yes! Thank-you (*Thobela*)! You've got it.

**Q:** Now I understand your theology. You have taught it well. I know Jesus taught his disciples to take up their cross and follow him. So, you say you are doing the same?

**All:** Yes.

The immediate context helps to shed light on Enos Chiloane's choice and interpretation of a detail that occurs only in John's gospel, and receives little or no attention elsewhere. Not only had the Blyde River been crossed, but the vanguard had slept rough in the compound of the Conservation Office of the Blyde River Nature Reserve. When we arrived, mid-morning, they were completing a meeting, outside the office, with the Chief Conservation Officer, a Mr Theron, and several other officers whom Theron had called in to help him deal with the reoccupation. The conservation officers were departing as we arrived, on their way to further meetings concerning the Moletete. The community's lawyer, Durkje Gilfillan of the Legal Resources Centre, had not yet been informed of the return, and what response the police would make ten days after the inauguration of Nelson Mandela as State President was not yet known. The prospect of arrest was accepted as one possibility among many in 'the battle'. Further, as noted above, Chief Abuti Chiloane was opposed to the return, and had gone in person to the Nature Reserve to intervene against the vanguard, advising officials not to allow the return. It was on this specific morning, then, with the return to ancestral land hanging in the balance, and following a long night outside (as in a hostel, with no room for the women), with nothing to eat since the previous afternoon, that Enos Chiloane sees the vanguard as having crossed the Kidron to pray.

The references to the Blyderivierspoort Nature Reserve and its Conservation Office already signal the complex interaction of issues black, white and green in the case of the return of the Moletete to their ancestral land. Land Conservation, with a capital 'C', has been very much a white project, and has been seen and experienced as a white *dispossessive* project by

communities like the Moletele. Along the Blyde River, downstream from the dam under which lies a good deal of the ancestral land of the Moletele, is an expensive pleasure resort (formerly called Van Niekerk's Oord, now called the Aventura Swadini after a change of hands) operated as a parastatal (soon to be privatised) and patronised almost exclusively by wealthy whites. The slopes of the mountain in the Nature Reserve are hiked by whites, and the sister resort on top of the escarpment, the Aventura Blydepoort, is similarly frequented in the main by wealthy whites. The Blydepoort Resort was established on land taken from the Mashilane Community (the Farm Clermont 414 KT) which was forcibly removed and resettled across the highway (R532) on the farm Elandsfontein (435 KT). The resort stands in sharp contrast to the poverty of the resettlement location, Matibidi, in which the Mashilane now live. The description which follows was written during the first field trip to the (former) Eastern Transvaal, and could apply equally to the Swadini Resort along the Blyde in the lower part of the Canyon:

A tourist resort, originally called the Odendaal Oord, now called the Aventura Blydepoort, catering to wealthy whites, was built on the Mashilane land, overlooking the awe-inspiring Blyde River Canyon which forms part of the Blyderivierspoort natuurreseervaat/Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. The resort features a private airstrip, tennis courts, swimming pool with cocktail bar, children's play park, indoor games facilities, golf and mini-golf, horse-riding, camping, hiking and trail walking in the nature reserve, residential chalets, conference facilities, youth hostel, restaurant, ladies bar, cafeteria, liquor store, general store, petrol station, and its own security service.

It is little wonder that Albie Sachs, introducing a chapter on environmental issues and the 'right to beauty' of the land, asks the question quoted above: 'Do you have to be white to be green?' His conclusion, that green issues are inextricably related to the issues of dispossession, poverty, land degradation, food production, and cultural tradition, goes a long way towards assisting communities on all sides of the land question to adopt a more a holistic approach to their land struggles, offering the possibility of the recognition of shared interests in land restitution and restoration (Sachs 1990: 140ff.).

In the event, when the vanguard of the Moletele crossed the Blyde they were unable to set foot upon much of their ancestral land, because it was (and is) located under the lake created by the Blydepoort Dam. The land is not as they left it, and their restitution claim, even to that part of their ancestral land currently in state hands, is making slow progress. Their rights in the land were unregistered, and they are facing serious questions concerning the feasibility of restoring their part Blyde River Canyon to them. A negotiated settlement, involving compensation (land, finances) and perhaps an interest in the Nature reserve, seems the most likely way forward. It was thus too soon for a full-throated celebration in

May 1994. Indeed, the Blyde was not the Jordan, but the Kidron. The emphasis was on prayer in a context of struggle.

Enos Chiloane's chiasmus, 'to pray being free, and to be free to pray,' is a powerful summary of the inter-relatedness of *borapedi* and praxis in the return. Across the Kidron lay Gethsemane, where Jesus prayed when he was 'about to be crucified.' The vanguard see themselves as answering Jesus' call to his disciples (the smaller group of male disciples are envisaged) to follow him on his way to the cross. There are echoes here of Mofokeng's *Crucified Among the Crossbearers* (1983) and of Chiloane's own indication, quoted above, that the vanguard saw itself as completing a mission of God in returning to their land, exhorted and compelled by the scriptures. The participatory relationality of Enos Chiloane's interpretation is immediate and personal: 'We have crossed the river Kidron. The Lord Jesus is with us.' Jesus has crossed the Blyde with the vanguard even as the vanguard had crossed the Kidron with him. What lies on the other side of the Blyde/Kidron is not the promised land, but a place of prayer and preparation, with the cross looming over it. The themes of sacrifice, discipleship and liberation are thus conjoined in a powerful relational hermeneutics uniting Jesus with his followers on the *via passionis, mortis et resurrectionis*. In the strikingly apt words of Mofokeng, taken from the conclusion of his *Crucified Among the Crossbearers*:

The Son lives never to die again and raises a community that loves and suffers with him, struggling against the powers of contradiction to the liberation of humanity, and for the emergence of a new world with justice for the dispossessed, and fraternity among humankind. He raises this community with the story of his life in which he goes the way 'from Jordan to Golgotha,' in which he identifies with the oppressed and the poor today and solidarises with them in their situation of crucifixion in the world. In other words, with his cry on the cross, he raises new followers ... he calls them to take that ultimate action, like him, to endure torture and crucifixion for justice and fraternity and triumph because he has triumphed as his resurrection reveals (1983: 262).

It is a passage which could have been written with the Moletete in mind, and recalls the statement of Chief Albert Luthuli made years earlier. Luthuli, responding to his dismissal as Chief of his tribe by the government in November 1952, penned a strikingly moving *theologia crucis* entitled 'The Road to Freedom is Via the Cross.' Issued conjointly by the African National Congress and the Natal Indian Congress, it concluded with the following statement:

It is inevitable that in working for Freedom some individuals and some families must take the lead and suffer: The Road to Freedom is via the Cross. *Mayibuye! Afrika! Afrika!*  
*Afrika!*<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Albert Luthuli, quoted as Appendix A in his *Let My People Go*, London, 1962, pp.208-211. The book itself ends with an epilogue, the concluding words of which are, as they could be no other, '*Mayibuye iAfrika! Come, Africa, come!*' (1962: 207).



In the case of the Moletele and so many others we may say the road home has been via the cross, or indeed that the exhortation *Mayibuye iAfrika!* bears within itself a knowledge of the cross, in that it is made in a context of suffering, linking the *memoria passionis* of a community with a mobilising call for land restitution. In this we may see again the conjunction of suffering, struggle and (anticipated) celebration in the hermeneutics of a grounded theology of land.

## **6.2 Dinkwanyane: Dispossession and Suspicion of the White Text**

Dinkwanyane is situated just off Route 532 in the Eastern Transvaal Highveld, not far from the Blyde River Canyon Nature Reserve. Coming from the direction of Ohrigstad, the village is found just beyond a very beautiful and fertile stretch of land at the foot of the mountains which marked part of the border with the former Lebowa. The white farms (e.g. Rietvley) in that valley are green and prosperous, the soil dark, fertile and well-watered by elaborate (and evaporation-vulnerable) above-ground spraying systems. Dinkwanyane, in contrast, is as dusty and poor a place as exists in that region.

The group interview was negotiated in advance with Mr Mono Mashego, a retired Headmaster and shopkeeper, who was insistent that the local Chieftainess be approached for her permission. The atmosphere was marked by political suspicion and the men who eventually took part in the interview expressed the need for caution. Nelson Mandela had been inaugurated the previous week and the meaning of the elections for 'traditional' leaders in the former 'homelands' (i.e. the question of who would and who would not survive the transition, and how) was not at all clear. Following an interview in her home, the Chieftainess granted her permission and four senior men took part. They were all of an age, born in the 1920s, had come to Dinkwanyane from four different places, and thus had four different stories to tell. Two had been members of communities which had been forcibly removed from their ancestral land (Nathan Modipa of Boomplaas, removed in 1956, and Mono Mashego of Frankfort, removed in 1951), and two had been labour tenants on white farms (John Mphogo at Majaditshukudu, and William Sethole at Pilgrim's Rest). Further, they came from different tribes and, while they used Sepedi as a *lingua franca*, had different first languages (Sepulana, Sepedi and Tsonga). Their different backgrounds, experiences of removal and socio-political analyses led to a searching and at times heated debate. In particular, distinct differences were

seen between Mono Mashego and Nathan Modipa with respect to how and to what extent the bible could be trusted, in general and in land struggles in particular.<sup>7</sup>

The exchanges between Mashego and Modipa comprise the clearest articulation of a local hermeneutics of suspicion encountered in the course of the research and thus are quoted at some length. While Mashego, very much the headmaster in style, suspects the bible as book, as text on paper, the product of white cultural and linguistic translation and interpretation, he is nonetheless willing to credit western civilisation with great advances in Africa, and sees the whiteness of the bible as text as signifying something more progressive (over against African ancestral tradition) than problematic. Modipa, exasperated with what he sees as Mashego's internalisation of western values, goes much further in his suspicion of the bible as a cultural, dispossessive instrument of the whites. Adam, if he was indeed formed from the earth, must have been a white man, he concludes, because 'the whites have all the land.' Even when he becomes convinced that the bible has some passages that are of use in the struggle for land restitution, he is still suspicious: 'Maybe it is only this particular copy of the bible that is written in this way. And in other bibles it is written in a different way' (see below). The excerpts that follow document selected moments in the Mashego-Modipa debate, together with some of the interventions of John Mphogo.

Following narrations of the *memoria passionis* concerning their respective relocations to Dinkwanyane, and a discussion of the importance of the ancestors and their graves for the Back to the Land Campaign, we turned to biblical passages concerning the land. The story of the creation of Adam was read (Genesis 2: 4-7; Sotho Bible), and the relation between humans and the soil discussed in light of the reading. What began as a reiteration of the text on the theme of the intimate inter-relatedness of people and land ('in the beginning God made humans out of the soil') became a sharp challenge to the text, and to white hermeneutical control, as soon as the question was asked from a contemporary perspective:

**Nathan Modipa:** There is a connection between humans and the soil because in the beginning God made humans out of the soil. After that God pumped the air through his nose so that he could breathe and become complete as a living human. At that time there was no rain, there was only mist. God made the man so that the man must live on the earth. But in reality the land belongs to the man, because the man was made out of the soil. If there had not been any soil there would have been no human being.

**Q:** What do you make of the connection between people and the land/soil today?

**Nathan Modipa:** People in fact are suffering on the land. Because they have been forcefully removed. They've been shifted around. They don't have their own land on which to stay.

<sup>7</sup> See Group Interview with Members of the Dinkwanyane Community, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, unpublished, 20 May, 1994. The interview was conducted in Sepedi, Sesotho, Sepulana and English, with Bright Mashego translating throughout. The translation was emended by Bright and myself as a result of listening to the tapes during the process of transcription.

The black man does not have his land, the land belongs to the whites! Even the bible has come into being through a white man. In fact it was a white man that was made there from that earth! The bible is not explaining properly what happened, because it was the white man who was created from that soil, and not the black man.

**Q:** In the text it wasn't a white man or a black man, it was just the first man. The colour doesn't come into it in the text.

**Nathan Modipa:** The first one to be created was white!

**Q:** The bible doesn't say that. The bible just says that God created a human. 'Adam', meaning the one taken from the soil: '*adamah*'. It doesn't say anything about the colour of the man.

**Nathan Modipa:** He was white, because the whites have all the land!<sup>8</sup>

Modipa's interpretation ('the land belongs to man because man was made from the soil') seems at first to be a restatement of the text, almost a common-sensical approach to the relation between *adamah* and *Adam*. It is as if Modipa's suspicion kicks in only when he is asked to consider the *adamah/Adam* question in light of relations between land and people *today*. His interpretation of the text *today* has everything to do with his experience of white ownership of the land and white provenance of the bible. Significantly, and in keeping with landless communities throughout South Africa, he begins with the suffering of his people, and the importance of suffering in the biblical hermeneutics of the TLRC communities may thus be seen as receiving further substantiation here. With Modipa, however, the relational hermeneutical pathway of suffering leads him not to an empowering engagement with the suffering and struggle of a community or character in the biblical text, but to a deep and searching suspicion of the text. The suffering of his people ('The black man does not have his land, the land belongs to the whites!') leads him to a scything and necessary suspicion of whites, and his suspicion of whites leads him in turn to his suspicion of the bible, because 'even the bible has come into being through a white man.' There is thus a sense in which Modipa's suspicion of the bible is a suspicion by association. The bible, not only the white man's instrument but his creation, is thus 'not explaining properly what happened.' What 'in fact' happened? Modipa asserts that 'it was a white man who was created from that soil, and not the black man!' Nor will Modipa be dissuaded from this assertion, for 'the whites have all the land!'

Following Modipa's first speech, and before his second speech answered the question, I wondered why he had said, 'the land belongs to man, because man was made out of the soil,' and not the converse, heard as often in the TLRC communities, 'man belongs to the land, because he was made from the soil'. Both statements may be seen as valid implications of the

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, pp.10-11.

*adamah/Adam* text. On the strength of the interviews and hearings in the communities, which addressed both ancestral and biblical traditions, it may be said that the two statements need to be taken together for a holistic understanding of the position. The motto 'we belong to the land' and the affirmation 'the land belongs to us' are made together, and witness together to the multivalent integrality of local spirituality and praxis concerning land. The land and its people, the people and their land, belong to each other.

At this point Mono Mashego comes in, agreeing that the Genesis story 'does not involve the black man,' but disagreeing that it was a white man who was created first. For Mashego, the first man must have been a Jew because God chose the Jews. Where the black man comes in is not clear to him, but he points to one of Abraham's children 'who suffered very much' and 'made a different nation' (Ishmael?). Modipa agrees in part, but returns to his primary assertion that Adam was a white man, whatever colour subsequent men might have been. Further, he follows his suspicion to God h'self, from whom black people are cut off because 'God will only have mercy on white people!' For Modipa, we have only to look at the land to know this:

**Mono Mashego:** Now, with regards to the children of Abraham, to come to them, there is one of them who suffered very much and went and made a different nation. We want to know which was this other nation that Abraham's son went to, because if they are all made out of the dust, where were all these other nations coming from?

**Nathan Modipa:** Adam was a white man! These other people who were made out of the soil, they were black men, if you can judge it correctly.

**Mono Mashego:** How can you say that?

**Nathan Modipa:** What else can I say!? Because that's what it seems like to me!

**Mono Mashego:** How can you say that? Because we black people, according to you we don't have a connection with the soil! You say it's the whites! So answer that one!

**Nathan Modipa:** We black people don't have a connection or relationship with God. God will only have mercy on white people! Only with regards to white people will God have mercy! The thing is that the white man was supposed to share with the black man. But the white man has refused to share with the black man, so we are troubled. We are persecuted. They forcefully remove you from a first place to a second place. Then they take you from that place to another place. From that place to another place. And on and on and on and on. The only thing they can't do is put us up on top of a tree!<sup>9</sup>

*Susplicere aude!* Modipa's suspicion, born of the suffering of his landless people, makes bold to challenge God. Whites, who were 'supposed to share' the land with blacks are getting away with the dispossession of blacks. God is allowing it! Moreover, recurrent removal and relocation has made dispossession a state of being: black people are cut off from the land and thus cut off from God. And it is God's fault! Modipa, in a way reminiscent of the Psalmist

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, pp.11-12.



(cf. Psalm 73) and of Job, demands to know what God has done to stop the suffering of his people in the face of the prosperity of the wicked. What has God done to stop the dispossessors, and their serial dispossession of his people. His conclusion, based on the evidence to hand, may be outlined as follows: God has had mercy on the whites and not on us, even though we are the ones who are suffering! God is making a preferential and exclusive option for the dispossessor over the dispossessed! How can God have mercy on white people!? Such a God must be suspected! The ethic implied in Modipa's statement that 'the white man was supposed to share with the black man,' is turned back on God, its presumed author. Whites have subverted the way things were meant to be, and yet God, who meant them to be that way, still has mercy on them! A white text and a God who has mercy only on dispossessive whites - if that is God, black people have no relationship with (him). Modipa suspects the entire white theological-textual discourse.

A brief reflection on the etymological root of 'suspicion' is helpful at this point. Taken from the Latin *susplicere*, the verb is given as meaning to look up at, admire or suspect - a rather incompatible collection of meanings on the face of it. Making sense of the apparent incompatibility is the inherent perspective of *susplicere*. A compound of *sub* + *specere*, the verb means literally 'to look at *from below*.' That suspicion has an inherently subjacent perspective would not surprise Nathan Modipa. His own suspicion, and the suspicion of the poor and dispossessed in general, is very much one *from below* - from the 'underside of history'. *Suspicion, a looking-at-from-below, may thus be seen as a most legitimate and necessary aspect of a hermeneutics grounded in the experience of suffering and struggle of dispossessed communities.*

Both Mashego and Modipa see the biblical text as a white production, but proceed in radically different directions thereafter. For Mashego the text, notwithstanding its whiteness, represents a necessary and desirable advance, civilised and scientific, on the 'primitive ways' of his forefathers; for Modipa, as we will see, the text represents the destruction of his culture and the dispossession of his people. Mashego, throughout the interview, began with the text; Modipa began with the experience of suffering and struggle of his people. Mashego questioned African ancestral tradition in light of the text; Modipa questioned the text and its God in the light of the suffering of his people. Yet, for all Mashego's internalisation of western values, he too emphasises suffering in his attempt to identify in the text an indication of the origin of black people. Agreeing with Modipa that Adam is not the answer (though for a different reason: Mashego saw Adam not as a white man but as Jewish, 'because God chose the Jews'), Mashego sees a possibility in the reference to the 'other' son of Abraham, whom he

characterises as the one who 'suffered very much,' thus linking the themes of difference, alterity and suffering. However, just when Mashego seemed to be moving in a direction that could be characterised as at least compatible with that of Modipa, he launched into a most white and headmaster-ly discourse on the western cultural superiority represented by the bible, which he used as a physical prop in his argument:

**Mono Mashego:** I see it another way. The bible was especially for the Hebrews. Because black people didn't know the bible. Didn't write the bible. They were just praying to their ancestors. How we used to pray our forefathers! Now the white people who wrote this bible have got the information from the Jews. The Jews are also white people - but that should not scare us. We are learning from whites. This is western civilisation (he brandishes the bible).

**Nathan Modipa:** I don't accept that! I don't accept that we must be learning from whites or western civilisation!

**Mono Mashego:** No? But our way was just to pray to our ancestors. It's not politics. We want the truth. Our own belief was only to go to the graves and pray there. When we are in trouble, we used to go to the graves and pray. Yes! Now, here (holding up bible) is a new departure altogether. Based on western civilisation. But now, to a person who understands, he should know that I'm a person! So the right way is not always to pray to our forefathers and so on, because they (drops bible loudly at this point) were only men.

... It is true, people were not used to this book, the bible. We black people were praying God in our own way. When the whites invented the printing press, paper and printing. To understand creation is a very long story. We are just learning. When you are passing by the road and you see some oranges on a tree, sometimes you can eat the wrong one. But those people know that the right thing is the Word of God. That is, black people know that the right thing is the Word of God. Very few will remain with the old ways, with the fore-fathers.

**Q:** Do you see how the two might be the same way? The ancestors and the bible? Or are they two distinct ways?

**Mono Mashego:** In fact I see them as two distinct ways. Some people are still inclined to go to the old ways, and then they mix them with the bible. These are two ways. There are those who read and understand, and live lives as it should be.

**Q:** Do you say the bible represents western civilisation because it was whites who brought it?

**Mono Mashego:** Yes, because the whites brought it with them when they came. They were the ones who made the printing press.

**Q:** Ah, yes it comes to you as a book.

**Mono Mashego:** That's it. And it was the whites who made that book.

**Q:** So, even though the bible comes from the Middle East and is primarily Jewish in background, you still say it's white and western.

**Mono Mashego:** I understand that it started in the Middle East, in Palestine - but by the time it came to Africa it was whites who were bringing it. Whether it's in the Middle East or in South Africa, the fact is it's white men who brought it. The thing is, for me, that Africans are learning. We are learning that (pointing to bible), we are following that. But that does not mean that we can take the old way with the ancestors and this way with the bible and just put the two together. It is very hard to get the true Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

This performance by Mashego, with its classic statement of the progress myth, incited a heated debate concerning whether or not western 'civilisation' had been good for Africa, and concerning the role of the bible in the 'civilisation' process. In a local take on Takatso

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, pp.12-13, 16-17.

Mofokeng's 'incomprehensible paradox,' the historical crisis of the bible in Africa was given a grounded articulation. Mashego's uncritical acceptance of the bible as a means of (white and western) progress, was rejected by Modipa and Mphogo, who saw white education as having 'destroyed the earth for us':

**Q:** Coming back to the issue of black and white and the land. You said, to summarise, that God must have made a white man to begin with because the whites have taken all of the land. It reminds me of a saying I've been hearing a lot: that when the whites first came they had the bibles and Africans had the land; but now the Africans have the bibles and the whites have the land. In fact, some have told me that it happened when the whites told the Africans to pray with their eyes closed. While their eyes were closed the whites took the land and gave the bibles.

[There is much laughter at this point.]

**Mono Mashego:** Yes, they are right. The whites were very clever. They took the land through cleverness.

**Nathan Modipa:** Yes, we agree with these sayings, because this education was to destroy our world. It was their education that destroyed the earth for us.

**John Mphogo:** It's true that education has destroyed the earth. Because they came, they taught us *their* education. *They gave us things like mirrors, so that we look at ourselves through the mirror. And then we forget our own way of life.* They gave us wire pins for hooking up our blankets. And they used these instruments, like the pins and the mirrors, and also knives, to steal away our cattle and our land. We traded them for those things.

This statement should not be misinterpreted as politics. We are not talking politics here. We are talking the truth of what has happened in this country!

Furthermore, the bible has contributed to the theft of our land. Because we were taught to close our eyes and pray, meanwhile that's when the whites go and do whatever they want to do - while our eyes are closed, as they taught us to pray.

**Bright Mashego:** Are you getting suspicious or nervous about politics? Are you pulling your punches and reducing your words because you are afraid for political reasons? You should speak your mind and not be worried about who is going to say what in a political way about what you have said.<sup>11</sup>

There is so much going on in these exchanges that it would take us much longer than space permits to follow each avenue of argument. Again, Modipa's analysis is the more penetrating. Where Mashego speaks of the cleverness, as in trickery, of the whites in the acquisition of land, and is willing to concede that the bible was used in this, Modipa and Mphogo see the bible as part of a more comprehensive assault on the culture and land of their people. White education, of which the bible is taken as symbol, almost metonym, is seen as having 'destroyed our world' - where 'world' is a multivalent indicator, inclusive of earth and way of life on the earth. White education was a mirror which distorted the self-view of black South Africans, says Mphogo. The identity discourse of black South Africans thus entered the realm of reflection, refraction, and distortion.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*, pp.15-16.

At the same time, it is important to note the 'nervousness' with respect to 'politics' in Mphogo's speech. In the immediate context, 'politics' refers primarily to the politics of the transition, and in particular to the question of what an ANC-led government would do with the former 'homeland' of Lebowa and its political leaders at the local level. Mphogo wishes to distance himself from such 'politics', while asserting as forcefully as he can 'the truth of what has happened in this country' - a truth that is free from party-political affiliation precisely because it is grounded for Mphogo in 'what has happened'. Mphogo, in spite of Bright Mashego's exhortation, did well to cover his back: his speech contains an implicit condemnation of the entire project of grand apartheid, with its separate 'dumping grounds' ('homelands'), 'gutter education' ('bantu education'), and so on. Indeed, it 'destroyed the earth' for them, both physically (with respect to the linkages between dispossession, 'consolidation', poverty and the degradation of the land) and metaphorically.

That this is the case is highlighted in Modipa's questioning not only of the biblical text but also, surprisingly for him, of African ancestral tradition itself. Separated from the land, Modipa doubted whether or not the ancestors could still be said to be the 'blanket' of his people. 'You can believe it or not believe it,' he says, 'because the land now belongs to the whites':

**Nathan Modipa:** Yes it is true: the ancestors are said to be our blanket. It is not just a metaphor (*setsoantso*). I've gone to them for healing. When the doctors could not help me, I was healed through the help of the ancestors. When I came near to my ancestors, it was then that I felt myself to be warm. They are that blanket. I've got children educated here. I managed to educate them even though I was not employed. That was by the help of the ancestors. Yes, you can see the ancestors as that blanket. You can believe it, or you can also not believe it. Because the land belongs to the whites. Even though they can sell a piece of land to you, and at a later time they come and move you out of that piece of land. You are moved out even though you have planted many plantations, mealie crops, they only tell you that you are not supposed to stay there - you have to move. You start another settlement - you dig the mountain and clear up everything. That's why I say the land belongs to the whites and not the blacks.<sup>12</sup>

It may be further noted, with respect to the history of the bible in South Africa, that the whites, while taking the land, retained their bibles as well. The exchange, surreptitious, of bibles for land referred to in the popular saying was unequal in a way that the saying does not acknowledge - for whites, in taking the land, did not cede discursive control over the interpretation of the bible. Far from being ceded to them, the right of the dispossessed to interpret the bible for themselves had to be seized. The achievement of an independent

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<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, pp.17-18.



hermeneutic is thus all the more 'incredible'. As Mashego notes, while the bible may say one thing, the 'white man has been wise before the blacks':

**Mono Mashego:** You (Modipa) say the land belongs to the whites. The bible says this land was created by God. Of course the white man has been wise before the blacks.

**Nathan Modipa:** The white men *sold* the land to the black men. What happened is that we did not have the intelligence of asking them, 'Where did you buy the land yourselves in the first place?' After we bought that land, they forcefully removed us.

**Q:** Good question! Where did anyone get the land in the first place? And whose was it to buy and sell? The first verse of Psalm 24 says, 'The earth is the Lord's and the wealth thereof, the land and all of its people.'

**John Mphogo:** Truly speaking this land is not a human being's land, it is God's land. It is because the white man has come here with an experience of how to work on the land, and because they were having capital on their side. And then that's why now they tried to own the land. They were claiming that the land belongs to them, because they were having capital. And they were also controlling the black man.<sup>13</sup>

This exchange echoes several of the emergent themes from previous chapters. The speeches of Modipa and Mphogo give further definition to the conflict of spiritualities and conceptualisations of land - between land as a commodity bought and sold in the marketplace and land as the gift of the Creator in community. Petrus Makhubedu's analysis of white title deeds as receipts is given support here, signalling the dispossessive process of land demarcation (the surveying of land and the setting of boundaries on the land), deed definition, and price-setting. The testimony of Aninka Claassens that the paper trail of title deeds ends with one or another Boer Republic or Colonial Government is given a local grounding in the speech of Modipa. *His question, 'Where did you buy the land yourselves in the first place?' should be asked in every hearing of every land claim.* Further, the question of the heavy cost to black communities of compromising and purchasing (white, western) title deeds to land that was already theirs by ancestral right is highlighted by Modipa's laconic summation: 'After we bought that land, they forcefully removed us.' As seen above, the possession of title deeds in no way safe-guarded the rights of black South Africans to ownership of their land. Claassens' point, that the law was used not only to deny blacks access to private ownership of land, but also 'to destroy the property rights of those blacks who managed to acquire title deeds before the 1913 Land Act closed the land market,'<sup>14</sup> is worth remembering at this point. Taking the Modipa statement and the Claassens analysis one step further, the cost to black communities of purchasing their ancestral land went beyond the monetary price they paid. In buying (back)

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, pp.18-19.

<sup>14</sup> Aninka Claassens, 'For whites only - land ownership in South Africa,' in Michael de Klerk, ed., *A Harvest of Discontent: The Land Question in South Africa*, IDASA, Cape Town, 1991, p51-52.

their land from their dispossessors, black communities also bought into the conceptualisation of land as marketable commodity. While it is difficult to quantify such cost, the compromise of religio-cultural tradition concerning the land and its people may be measured in part by the degree to which many of the communities continue to experience internal division and conflict concerning the question of land tenure, private *versus* communal, following their returns to ancestral land. That the lines of division concerning tenure often parallel the lines of division established at the time of the forced removal (between those who co-operated in the removal and those who resisted it) is further testimony to the ongoing power of western conceptualisations of land in South Africa. This aspect of cost makes the failure of the strategy of compromise (black communities with registered title deeds were removed regardless) all the harder to conscience. On the other hand, communities like the Bakwena ba Mogopa and the Bakubung ba Ratheo, who could produce registered title deeds, have been able to win their cases for land restitution more quickly than those who cannot; in their cases restitution was of title in both ancestral and western senses of the term. As the Land Commission and Land Court consider the claims of communities with unregistered rights in land, they will be called to respect the interactive merits of right and relationality in ancestral claims.

Mphogo, in a speech which may be taken as definitive of a grounded view of the relation between conceptualisation and commodification, identifies three aspects of the presumption of whites to ownership of land: a knowledge of how to work on the land; the having of capital; and the control of blacks. The first, an 'experience of how to work on the land,' is an ambiguous point, in that whites were admired for their farming ability, but opposed when they employed this knowledge exclusively for their own benefit at the expense of black farmers who were on the land before them.<sup>15</sup> On its own, the agricultural knowledge of whites is seen to be of potential benefit for all who live on the land, then as now. It is the two points that follow, capitalisation and control, that tell the tale - leading us to identify a dispossessive triad already documented in the discourse of the Moletete: conceptualisation, capital and an agri-business approach to agriculture, and, partly as a corollary, control of black people are the pillars of the white claim that 'the land belongs to us'.

Concerning biblical hermeneutics, there is in Mphogo's speech the beginnings of a recognition of the usefulness of the biblical text in the struggle of his people to regain their land. The text of Psalm 24:1 is seen to be 'speaking truly' when it says that the land is not the possession of a human being, it is God's land. Mphogo is thus able to set up a contrast

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, the speeches of Willis Ngobe of Dingleydale, in chapter four.

between the dispossessive exclusivity of the white regime on the land and the theological assertion of Psalm 24 that 'the earth is the LORD's.' In so doing, Mphogo provides us with another example of the strategy of using the biblical text to appeal over the heads of unjust earthly authorities to a Higher Authority.

Modipa, for his part, does grant towards the end of the interview that the bible, in the hands of his people, could be an instrument of liberation. Yet even then it is a guarded acknowledgement; his hermeneutic of suspicion, of the bible in general more than of a given text in particular, is still hard at work. At issue in the last segment of the interview was the campaign of the Rural Women's Movement for the right of women to own land in their own name, whether married or unmarried. The text in question is that of Numbers 27:1-11, which narrates the successful attempt of the daughters of Zelophehad to receive, in the absence of a son, their father's land allocation. While both the issue and the text will receive detailed attention in the chapter to follow, the approach of Modipa to the text is quoted as an example of how a hermeneutic of suspicion may, almost in spite of itself, find assistance for local land struggles in the biblical text. Modipa sees the text as calling his people to rise up, with God's blessing, and fight for their ancestral land. On the other hand, he suspects that it is only the specific (Sotho) copy of the bible that he holds in his hands that says this, and that other copies of the bibles say something different:

**Nathan Modipa:** This matter is clear, we understand this matter. We the people of Dinkwanyane were unfortunate, because our wealth has been grabbed, stole by the whites. Because according to our understanding and tradition, what belongs to Mashego, for example, is his property and his wealth. But if Mashego does not have a son, then the wealth will go to the daughters of Mashego. If he does not have daughters, then it goes to a member of Mashego's family, like in this reading from the bible. But all of this was wiped out by what the whites did - stealing all our land and wealth. So we at Dinkwanyane, where are we going to lodge our complaint? We think that you, who have come to us today, might be such a one. The people of Dinkwanyane should pick up and start trying to fight for our wealth!

**Q:** So you're saying, yes it's all right for daughters to inherit when there is no son, but what is there to inherit anyway, because the whites took everything!

**Nathan Modipa:** Exactly! According to this bible, we have to go back and fight for our ancestral belongings. That's what the bible says to me. From what I can find in these verses in Numbers, God is in favour of my people going back and taking the land that used to be their ancestors'. If you come and read this part of the bible and ask anyone around here about what is their belongings, they will feel you are trying to mobilise them to fight for their what is theirs by right. But now I am suspicious - maybe it is only this particular copy of the bible that is written in this way. And in other bibles it is written in a different way.

**Q:** Is it that you don't trust the bible or you don't trust the whites?!

**Nathan Modipa:** No! We don't trust them! Because they take our belongings, our wealth. And then they claim that this is their land! So we find ourselves not having a place to stay. I don't, I cannot trust the white man. Maybe it is because of this new dispensation, because of the changes of the new government, that it is now that you come and tell us this.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Dinkwanyane Interview, op cit., pp.23-24. The last part of Modipa's speech raises the question of how the researcher and his/her role is interpreted by the people with whom he/she does the research. The questions of



For Modipa everything comes back to the land and the land-lessness of his people. As with ancestral tradition itself, the loss of the land is seen to have attenuated the potential connection his people might have had with the biblical Israel concerning the inheritance of family land. What is left to inherit? he asks. And why discuss the issue of women owning land when his people have been removed from the land?! Modipa's thinking shows both the strength and weakness of a hermeneutic of suspicion: it cuts deeply enough for analysis to be radical, but on its own it is almost defeatist in its finality, subverting even the call of God in the text 'to mobilise to fight for what is (ours) by right.'

Again, a hermeneutics of suspicion is seen to need a hermeneutics of affirmation (or of trust, following Gerald West's terminology), for the struggle for the restoration of land and people to each other to succeed fully. For the transition period to be truly transformative requires that the work of deconstruction be accompanied by the work of reconstruction, and the work of criticality by the work of creativity. Thus it is that we turn now to the biblical hermeneutics of the Leroro community.

### **6.3 Leroro: Affirming the End of the Old: 'the holy scriptures are taking place'**

If it was suspicion of the biblical text that predominated in Dinkwanyane, it was affirmation of the biblical text, and affirmation of the end of 'the old type of life' and the birth

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trust and advocacy are highlighted in particular. Modipa sees my action, in coming to Dinkwanyane, setting up the interview and drawing attention to this biblical text, as one that would be interpreted by his community as encouraging, even inciting, them to mobilise to fight for their land. This is for him a surprising turn of events (a white man coming with a bible that advocates the reclaiming of ancestral land) that he suspects is attributable to the 'new dispensation' of change associated with the new government. Bright Mashego entered into a discussion with Modipa at this point, asking again about why he was 'nervous' about the perceived political aspects of the interview - from the need to clear the interview with the chieftainess in the first place to this last statement by Modipa. Bright tried to clarify that we had no connection with any political party, and that the political implications of the topic of God and the land were not taken by us in a party-political manner. That we had been rumoured to have close ties with local ANC supporters, having been seen talking to a prominent 'ANC man' resident in Dinkwanyane, did not help. With respect to myself, Bright explained that I was not a South African and had no material interests at stake: no land or wealth to try and retain in the 'new' South Africa by putting on a 'black face' at the last minute. He noted that I had been working in Alexandra Township since 1986, during the days of the State of Emergency, and that the SACC had been supporting the struggles of rural communities against forced removal since the 1970s. Modipa and Mphogo were not convinced, however; Alexandra was a long way away, they did not know the SACC, and, after all, I was a white man. It may be noted that there is little or no tradition of receiving and interacting with researchers in Dinkwanyane, making it understandably difficult for Modipa and Mphogo to know how to read us. Further, it may be acknowledged again, as in the introduction, that the research was from the beginning done in support of the struggles of landless black communities to regain their ancestral lands. It was thus at the point where the general politics of land restitution become party-political in the immediate wake of the April 1994 elections that the question of how to interpret the researcher became especially sharp in Dinkwanyane. In most other communities the point at which this question became sharp was the point at which the question of women and land was introduced.



of 'a new type of life' in light of the text, that predominated twenty kilometres down the road (Route 532) in Leroro. Leroro, located north of Graskop along the Blyde River Canyon, was created in the 1960s to resettle victims of forced removals from farms and communities to the south (e.g. Frankfort 509 KT, Black Hill 528 KT, Rotunda Creek 510 KT, Vaalhoek 474 KT), among whom were represented the seven participants in the group interview.<sup>17</sup> Following narrations of the *memoria passionis* of the respective removals, and a discussion of the significance of the graves of the ancestors for land struggles,<sup>18</sup> we turned our attention to the role of God and of the bible in their struggle for ancestral land. Idos Mokoena, the youngest member of the community present, recast the question in more general terms, as follows:

**Idos Mokoena:** In the matter of God, the land and justice, what connections do you see between the three? Does God accept that people should be forcefully removed?

**Emelia Sedibe:** There is no way God can accept that people were forcefully removed! Because this is to trouble people and to make people to suffer!

**Idos Mokoena:** What do you think about different races and the land? Should the land belong to only one race?

**Emelia Sedibe:** What I would like is that people should stay together on the earth, regardless of whites or other tribes. There should not be more for one than the other. We should stay here together in peace. We should stay here and enjoy peace and love. They should treat us very well, fairly. And we also should treat them the same, and be fair. We can gain benefits from each other. God loves us to stay in peace. God didn't say we should suffer on the earth. God does not like troubles, God loves love. Because if we face difficulties then we pray to God and God should help us.

**William Kgalane:** As we are the creatures of God, as we are now, we are created by God. So we thank God now, as he is eradicating that old type of life. Getting rid of apartheid, making changes in our country. We cannot do anything without God. God has helped us by eradicating that old type of life. Apartheid. He is bringing now a new type of life which is

<sup>17</sup> The group interview took place in the courtyard (*lapeng*) of Mr Winus Nyathi, and was conducted in Sepedi, Sesotho, Sepulana and English, with Idos Mokoena, the Projects Co-ordinator of the local Advice and Resource Centre, facilitating, and Bright Mashego translating. Taking part in the interview were:

Name	Birth	Removal to Leroro from
Mr William Kgalane	b. 1932	Vaalhoek 474 KT, 1969
Mrs Nolita Kgalane	b. 1930s	Vaalhoek 474 KT, 1969
Mrs Emelia Sedibe	b. 1914	Frankfort 509 KT, 1960
Mrs Dikeledi Mashego	b. 1951	Rotunda Creek 510 KT, 1968
Mr Winus Nyathi	b. 1952	Black Hill 528 KT, 1967
Mrs Hildah Makogane	b. 1940s	Clermont 414 KT, 1950s, via Elandsfontein 435 KT, 1960s
Mr Idos Mokoena	b. 1965	Vaalhoek 474 KT, 1969

<sup>18</sup> In the course of the discussion of the *Memorandum* of June 25 1993 ('the graves of our ancestors are our title deeds, and we will return. Mayibuye!'), Emelia Sedibe made the telling point that since her husband and some of her children were 'graved' in Leroro, she herself would be buried in Leroro beside them. This in turn meant that the graves of her ancestors in Frankfort were not calling her as strongly as they would have done, raising questions concerning the impact of resettlement on the crucial issue of the significance of the location of the graves of loved ones and ancestors for a sense of community and home. Further, the discussion in Leroro introduced the importance of age in the debate concerning the struggle to return to ancestral land. Members of the generation of the elders felt that they were too old and tired to make the return (Emelia Sedibe, 80 years old at the time of the interview, said memorably: 'I'm just like a photograph. I am old. I have no more power.'), but that their children and children's children should return. The elders would assist them to do so, and expect in return to enjoy the fruits of their children being back on their ancestral land.

democracy. Which is: my voice counts. It is what we are all happy for. All the people are happy for that, because we praise God that he is mighty, that he has got power. He is also a God of the earth, in the earth. We are all his creatures. We all must know that we are the creatures of God, not the creatures of men.

We are envisaging at this present moment. But according to me, one is looking into what is happening. We are quite different from the services of God as regards this very issue. It seems as if we are now controlled by the evil spirit Satan. And not by God because everything is very difficult. Looking at men, their ways are so difficult. In one of the books God has said clearly that he never brought problems on the earth. But now if you once look at what is happening you see problems, because we have grown up in those problems, in those difficulties. Showing that the control is from the earth. It's from the devil Satan, the way it is. As he's (man) not controlled according to the wishes and will of God. He is controlled by the temptations of Satan, the will of Satan.

God himself is doing his own job. Now Dikeledi, you and the others are still young, you should know these things very well. Correctly. When you are still fresh.

**Dikeledi Mashego:** Through the scriptures we never heard about God talking about a colour of a person. We only heard God talking about people. Not black people or white people, just people. And then - how the white man has done it, in this country, in this world. And then even if they are claiming to be Christian they were lost. They were not doing according to Christianity. They were not supposed to be doing what they were doing. They were out of the scriptures in what they were doing. They were against the scriptures, the holy scriptures. Even though they were making prayers. They were out of the scriptures. The holy scriptures.<sup>19</sup>

The speeches of Sedibe, Kgalane and Mashego, taken together, introduce the theological contours of a hermeneutics of affirmation in Leroro. God is seen to be decisively at work in the eradication (it is seen as an ongoing process) of apartheid - 'that old type of life' - and in the bringing of a 'new type of life which is democracy' - which is 'my voice counts.' That life is characterised by Emelia Sedibe as one of peace, love, fairness, sharing for mutual benefit, an end to suffering, and piety. The theological ethics of Emelia Sedibe may be discerned in her 'should' statements - of which there are eight in her short speech, including one addressed to God. She builds her theological-ethical vision with beauty, beginning with an inclusive affirmation that 'people should stay *together* on earth, regardless of race,' and then moving on, sentence by sentence, to elaborate on matters of equality ('there should not be more for one than for another'), peace, joy ('we should ... *enjoy* peace and love'), love ('God loves love'), mutual fairness (as an expression of peace and love and expressing itself in the 'gaining of benefits from each other'), an end to suffering (in contrast to the *memoria passionis* of forced removal and poverty), and supplication (the taking to God in prayer of troubles and difficulties). God is seen by Sedibe as being constrained to answer such prayers: 'God should

<sup>19</sup> See the Group Interview with Members of the Leroro Community, Relocated from Vaalhoek, Frankfort, Black Hill, and Clermont/Elandsfontein, Eastern Transvaal Highveld, unpublished, 21 May, 1994, pp.16-18.

help us,' she declares, quietly yet firmly. Emelia Sedibe's 'God should' statement witnesses powerfully to the tenacity, even audacity, of her faith.

We must also note the embrace of justice and love in Emelia Sedibe's theological ethics. God, says Emelia, could in no way accept that people be forcibly removed because 'that is to trouble people and make people to suffer.' Far from this, 'God loves us to stay in peace. God didn't say we should suffer on the earth. God does not like troubles, God loves love.' In lines that echo the Psalms (cf. 85:10 and 89:14) and the Johannine literature in particular in the biblical corpus, and a series of 'political theologians' (cf. Niebuhr 1932; Bonino 1983; Lebacqz 1986, 1987), love and justice are seen as having much to do with each other. Reinhold Niebuhr's often-quoted observation, 'justice that is only justice is less than justice' (1932: 258), was made in the course of his argument that while justice is the best *possible* harmony in an immoral world, compromised as it is by the sinfulness of humanity, it is not the best *imaginable* harmony (Lebacqz 1986: 86). We deal not with perfect justice but with relative justice in a sinful world; such justice may strive to approximate the ideal of love, and may be inspired by love, but may not be said to be love. Because love cannot be fully realised in a sinful world, neither can perfect justice. As Karen Lebacqz observes of Niebuhr's ethics, 'All historical enactments of justice stand under the judgement of love. Love requires justice for the complex realities of the sinful social world. Yet, love also transcends, fulfils, negates and judges justice. It transcends justice because it goes beyond, exceeding the demands of justice' (1986:86). Indeed, for Niebuhr, justice as we know it may be seen, as summarised memorably by Lebacqz, as 'love compromising with sin.' There is thus a dialectic of love and justice in Niebuhr that is instructive for the grounded theological ethics of Emelia Sedibe, for whom there is a compelling relation between God's 'love of love' and God's rejection of injustice - a relation that is seen to have direct relevance for human social ethics. Sedibe's love language points us in the direction of the relationality of justice, a point to which we will return in the final chapter.

For William Kgalane the 'new type of life' is a democratic life, which he defines succinctly as 'my voice counts' - a central assertion both of local politics and grounded theology. Kgalane's theological reflection upon the ethico-political beginning of this 'new life' in South Africa takes us through the basic assertions that we are, all of us alike, creatures of God and thus equal before our creator; that God is mighty to save, intervening in human history to eradicate apartheid; that God is 'also' a God of the earth (and 'in the earth' - a grounded God?); and that our joy is directly related to the justice God is working on earth ('that is what we are happy for'). Kgalane echoes Archbishop Tutu in his emphasis on our



shared being as God's creatures, an affirmation that seeks to bring all humanity together under a common God, sharing the image of God, and equal before God and each other - an anthropological and socio-political argument symbolised in Tutu's references through the transition period to a 'rainbow people of God' (Tutu 1994). Further, the relationality of justice may again be seen in Kgalane's association of justice and joy (rejoicing) in his statement, 'God is bringing now a new type of life which is democracy. Which is: my voice counts. It is what we are all happy for. All the people are happy for that, because we praise God that he is mighty, that he has got power.'

While Kgalane praises God for enabling the transition from apartheid to democracy ('We cannot do anything without God'), he also confesses that the ways of men are far from the ways of God. His people have 'grown up in problems' created by (men), and sees the hand of 'the devil Satan' in these problems. That is 'the way it is.' By his actions, (man) shows that he is controlled not by God but by Satan - an assessment which Kgalane takes from the New Testament, and which he employs, as we will see below, as part of his biblical hermeneutics. Kgalane, not about to be carried away on a wave of euphoria even when 'envisaging' the transition, is theologising about both the advent of the new and the ongoing influence of the old. The affirmation that God is at work is tempered by the acknowledgement that Satan is also - though the last word goes to God, who is 'doing his own job.'

It is necessary to note that Kgalane's ascription of agency to Satan does not lead him away from a sense of human responsibility. Specifically, with respect to the political changes he has been discussing, he observes, 'We are quite different from the services of God with regards this very issue.' 'Looking at men,' says Kgalane, 'their ways are so difficult.' These statements come as confessions of human culpability, and it is significant that Kgalane does not single out any one race or group of people as being exclusively responsible for the difficulties and problems. While it would have been easier and understandable for him to have condemned the whites who dispossessed his people and established apartheid, it is an inclusive and thus more courageous 'we' that Kgalane uses in his confession.

Dikeledi Mashego, neatly invited by Kgalane, turns our attention to the scriptures in the consideration of God, justice and the land. Making a distinction that Nathan Modipa in Dinkwanyane did not, Dikeledi is able to remain *pro scriptura* herself while condemning white Christians as being *contra scriptura*. Whites who supported apartheid, 'even if they claimed to be Christians' and were 'making prayers,' were 'lost' and 'outside of the scriptures in what they were doing,' declares Dikeledi. In making this assessment she is relying on her own reading and hearing of the scriptures: 'Through the scriptures we never heard about God



talking about a colour of a person. We only heard God talking about people. Not black people or white people, just people.' Her affirmation of a scriptural basis for an inclusive vision of humanity is well supported throughout the TLRC communities, as is her basic hermeneutical affirmation that 'through the scriptures ... we heard God talking' - an affirmation of the scriptures as a medium for God's communication. It is *through* the scriptures as medium, and not *in* the scriptures as static semantic repository, that God's Word is heard. Further, we may note again the foregrounding of the first person plural in the hearing of the Word of God in the TLRC communities: 'through the scriptures *we* ... heard God talking.' Dikeledi's high view of the scriptures may be further seen in her use of the formula 'the holy scriptures,' which she repeats after the word 'scriptures', reinforcing her view of the scriptures as the standard by which the behaviour of those who (mis)use the scriptures is judged. Dikeledi makes her ethical assertion, 'They were not doing according to Christianity. They were not doing what they were supposed to be doing,' on the basis of having heard with her own ears what God is saying through the scriptures. (Her 'we heard' is an oral reference, and thus the ears seem a better metaphor than the eyes.) She does not judge the scriptures according to the behaviour of those who brought the bible to her people; rather, it is the reverse: 'they were against the scriptures, the holy scriptures ... they were out of the scriptures, the holy scriptures.' Dikeledi's affirmation of the scriptures in spite of the behaviour of white (self-called) Christians, an affirmation of the message in spite of the messenger, makes a distinction that is a necessary component in the locally-effected reversal of the bible from an instrument of oppression to an instrument of liberation, and thus in the making comprehensible of the 'incomprehensible paradox.'

The relationality of the hermeneutics of affirmation in Leroro came to the fore dramatically when we focused in more detail on the April 1994 elections. God's role was affirmed as indispensable for the birth of the new South Africa, one which was bringing people together after the 'separatchood' of apartheid. In particular and most personally, God's hand was seen in the sending of Nelson Mandela, who was compared first to Moses, as liberator, and then to Jesus, as one who suffered and gave his life for us:

**Q:** Referring to the elections which we have just had, do you see the hand of God in this?

**Emelia Sedibe:** If it was not through the powers of God, then we couldn't have made the elections successfully. It is through the power of God, that he started to unite us, guiding us how we should live together. And even the man who started to teach the people, to recruit, to organise them to follow a democratic way, was given these powers by God.

**Q:** You mean Madiba? Mandela?

**Emelia Sedibe:** Yes. This one was sent by God.

**Dikeledi Mashego:** I would like to add on to this point. Looking at how Mandela has

fought, staying in jail for so long. I don't know any other person who could have fought like that, sacrificed like that for this issue. We see that the power of God is so great. We don't believe that Mandela was doing this himself. It is through the love of God. The will of God. I can compare him in the scriptures, the holy scriptures, with Moses. Moses was used by God to relieve the Israelites who were surprised and burdened by another nation, Egypt. They had been punished a long time and they were suffering. Until he succeeded in relieving them from Egypt they were suffering all these things that were happening to them. Then Moses led them out of that oppression to where they were going. After 400 years. But at last they reached their goal. Like ourselves - the holy scriptures are taking place.

**Q:** Today the holy scriptures are taking place?

**Dikeledi Mashego:** Yes. The way it's happening, it is a completion, a fulfilment of the scriptures.

**Q:** E-he, ke *sekunjalo*! [Nguni: now is the time!]

**Dikeledi Mashego** (laughing): E-he! *Sekunjalo*! *Ke nako*! [Sotho] Now is the time!

**Q:** Now is the time! I am thinking now of the song of praise to Mandela: 'Nelson Mandela - *Ha ho na ea tsoanang le eena*! (There is no-one like him!)'.

[Spontaneously everyone starts singing the song; some get up and dance.]

**William Kgalane:** Yes! (singing) 'Nelson Mandela - there is no-one like him!' It's like Jesus Christ. Like they say, there's no-one who's like Jesus Christ. He came to the earth to die for the people. He didn't come here for the Christian people, the righteous people, he came here for the sinners, to release them. And then there's so many problems with them; he wants those who are lost, who are doing evil things, so that he can show them the way. He wants people to change, to be like Jesus Christ. Then the Jews felt jealous, and they thought that he would take the kingdom of the Jews, and they killed him. They thought he was going to take the chieftaincy of the Jews, so they felt jealous and killed him.

At Jesus' birth, the Holy Spirit was going around, describing the situation. Like somebody has said, there was a rumour around that the king of Israel would be born. So the king at that time, Herod, deployed his soldiers and said to the people and officers, 'Go all over the place, if you find a young boy, kill him!' It was difficult for them to find Jesus. Because the Holy Spirit made Jesus, Maria and Joseph, I mean Maria and Joseph, to move from that place and go to the west. Satanic people were having Satanic thinkings. Jesus has come for us all. God made it that Jesus was saved from those people there who were trying to kill him. But many people had just died during that search for Jesus Christ.

Jesus has come for us, who are the sinners. So we thank Jesus Christ today. He came here to assist us. To make us pray God. And then we thank Jesus Christ, like Mandela himself, we thank him, who has given his live for the people! A person who stayed for a long, long time in jail. 27 years! Without his children. Because he was so educated - he was having everything, he was having food, he was having money. But it happens that he stayed a long time in jail. He left all these things and went to jail to die for the people! They are scarce, people like himself. This is all the might and power.

**Q:** Thank you father. I remember that when I first arrived in South Africa, in 1986, you could be arrested and put in prison just for having Mandela's face on your T-shirt. Just for that!

**William Kgalane:** Mandela has sacrificed himself for us (*u re hwetshe*) like Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

The relational hermeneutical pathway of celebration takes <sup>5/</sup> place in the speeches of Mashego and Kgalane with those of suffering and struggle, which themselves continue to form the more established contours of the hermeneutical context in Lerero as throughout the TLRC

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp.18-20.

communities. Made very much in a spirit of celebration, their speeches comprise an impassioned, grounded view of God as liberator and of Jesus as saviour, doing so in the course of a jubilant comparison of Nelson Mandela with both Moses and Jesus. In general, there is a sense in which celebration seems to be a matter of caprice, lacking the *gravitas* of suffering and struggle as relational pathways of interpretive engagement. A cautionary internal voice invites us to look askance at comparisons of Mandela with Moses and Jesus, seeing them as flights of fancy, potentially dangerous, and understandable only as temporary excesses of a spirit of rejoicing - a hermeneutical song and dance, as it were. Notwithstanding the validity of this sense of caution, and however unguarded its expression (and Mandela himself was the first to dissociate himself from such comparisons within hours of his release from prison<sup>21</sup>), celebration and rejoicing are integral aspects of the combative spirituality of resistance by which communities like Lerero managed to survive apartheid and look beyond it to a 'new type of life.' In this, Karl-Josef Kuschel's chiasmus on suffering and joy, discussed above, that 'there can be no theology of joy without a theology of the cross, and no theology of the cross without a theology of joy' (1995: 88), may be read in relation to the hermeneutics and spirituality of the TLRC communities. Dikeledi Mashego's celebration of a latter-day Moses sent by God to liberate her people occurs in the context of the punishment and suffering of Israel in Egypt, and of Mandela in jail. Similarly, William Kgalane's choice of the 'slaughter of the innocents' pericope (Matthew 2:13-23) and his narrative rendition from memory, sets his celebration of the salvation we have in Jesus in the context of the suffering and sacrifice of Jesus and of those who were made to suffer with him for his sake. Mandela too is celebrated in a context which remembers his suffering and sacrifice. Indeed, self-sacrifice so that others may live is an integral aspect of the relational hermeneutical pathway of celebration, and it is *the* point of comparison for Kgalane: Mandela's uniqueness ('there is no-one like him') consists in his willingness to 'sacrifice himself for us' - a point also noted by Mashego. When Kgalane considers with whom Mandela may be compared, it is thus Jesus whom he identifies. In this Kgalane is foregrounding a spirituality of liberation which conjoins sacrifice and celebration.

<sup>21</sup> Already in the first speech following his release from Victor Verster Prison on 11 February 1990, Mandela felt it necessary to state that he was not a prophet, but a servant. Addressing the crowd which had gathered on the Grand Parade in front of Cape Town's City Hall, Mandela declared: 'Friends, comrades and fellow South Africans. I greet you all in the name of peace, democracy and freedom for all! I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here today. I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands.' Reflecting on the speech five years later in his autobiography, Mandela says, 'I spoke from the heart. I wanted first of all to tell the people that I was not a messiah, but an ordinary man who had become a leader because of extraordinary circumstances. I wanted immediately to thank the people all over the world who had campaigned for my release' (Mandela 1994: 555).



The relational hermeneutical pathways of suffering, struggle and celebration may thus be seen to be interacting in these speeches. Indeed, it is in their conjunction, as expressed in the Mandela-Moses-Jesus comparisons, that we hear one of the clearest articulations of what a grounded soteriology and Christology might look like - to a consideration of which we now turn.

The biblical hermeneutics of both Mashego and Kgalane, following the relational pathways described above, may be described variously as liberative and transformative, political and personal, empowering and, in the final analysis, evangelical. In contrast to the suspicion that marked the Dinkwanyane interview, there were few more bible-affirming statements made in the course of the research than Dikeledi Mashego's 'the holy scriptures are taking place.' The power of God is seen to be at work in April 1994 in South Africa in a way that leads Dikeledi to affirm that the scriptures, particularly the exodus story, were being fulfilled. God had empowered Mandela in the same way that God empowered Moses of old. Her assertion witnesses to a kairotic reading of the signs of the times (*sekunjalo* and *ke nako* may well be seen as Nguni and Sotho translations of the Greek *kairos*), and to a liberative reading of the exodus. At the same time it is important to note Dikeledi's emphasis on liberation as 'relief from suffering.' While the political implications of the exodus from Egypt under Moses, and of the victory of the oppressed in the elections under Mandela, are evident in her interpretation, she uses the verb 'relieve' in preference to 'liberate' when she describes the action she is celebrating. Such an interpretation avoids the difficulties of a too-literal reading of the exodus, which might be seen to require that the oppressed physically leave the land in which they are oppressed. As Archbishop Ntongana has cautioned, critiquing an uncritical use of the exodus tradition in South African liberation theology: 'Contexts are different. Israel in Egypt for example, a popular text in the struggle, is not our context. Because the people of Israel were sojourners in Egypt - it was not their land. But this *is* our land! So, the contexts are different.'<sup>22</sup>

Kgalane, for his part, articulates a decidedly political interpretation of both the birth and death of Jesus Christ in the course of his comparison of Jesus and Mandela. As noted above, it is their willingness to sacrifice themselves so that others may live that impresses Kgalane as the point of comparison, and his political reading of that sacrifice witnesses yet

<sup>22</sup> Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, Interview, Jabulani, Soweto, unpublished, 17 December, 1993, p.5. Ntongana's point may be seen as supporting the argument of Clodovis Boff for a correspondence of relationships, and not of terms, model in the hermeneutics of liberation, wherein the correspondence is between the relationship of the biblical text to its context and the relationship of the contemporary interpreter(s) and his/her/their context (Boff 1987).



again to the conjunction of religio-cultural and socio-political analyses in the hermeneutics and praxis of the TLRC communities. Throughout his speech he makes a series of statements that identify those for whom Jesus has come, an identification which is itself political. Jesus has come for 'the people,' 'not Christian people and righteous people but the sinners, to release them,' 'for us all (not only for the Jews),' and 'for us who are the sinners.' In Kgalane's words may be heard an echo of Jesus' own (cf. Luke 19:1-10) and an allusion to Pharisees, biblical and latter-day (white in this case), is not far to find. Kgalane sees Jesus' mission as that of liberation from sin and the transformation of people: he wants to release sinners, to show those who are lost the way, those who are doing evil to change, to be like him. So far, except for the edge inherent in his assertion, biblical, that Jesus came for the sinners and not the righteous, Kgalane's interpretation would not be out of place in a Pretoria Sunday School. It is when he turns his attention to the way in which Jesus's mission was interpreted by those with power in his own society that Kgalane's hermeneutics becomes overtly political, and in this he may be seen to be following the biblical text in its own foregrounding of the political, religio-cultural and inter-personal oppositionality (the Herods are singled out for detailed treatment by both Matthew and Kgalane) that marks the gospel narratives. Kgalane offers a political account of both the end and the beginning of Jesus' life, identifying 'the kingdom of the Jews' and the 'chieftaincy of the Jews' as the key issue in the conflicts that mark Jesus' birth and death. Jesus is thought by 'the Jews' to want to seize the kingdom and become chief; they thus 'feel jealous' and kill him. Kgalane is careful to distance himself from the imputation of a political motive to Jesus, saying the Jews *thought* he wanted to take the kingdom/chieftaincy.

Kgalane's narrative analysis of Herod's efforts to kill Jesus in his infancy is worthy of a chapter on its own. The orality of 'the Holy Spirit was going around describing the situation,' and 'like someone has said, there was a rumour around that the king of Israel would be born,' is both kerygmatic and African. The *ditsomo* (legends) of the Basotho, for example, always begin with the words, '*Ba re, e ne e re*' (loosely: 'they say, once upon a time there was ...'), by which the current story-teller signals the tradition of story-telling which lies behind his/her own rendition. In two sentences Kgalane gives us the Holy Spirit 'going around describing,' 'someone' who has said something, and a rumour which is making the rounds - thus establishing the weight of tradition and the ambulatory dynamics of the story he is about to recount. The story itself, preached once a year (at most) during the season of Epiphany, enjoyed no little prominence in the struggle against apartheid during the 1980s. Its politics, with respect to both Herod and Egypt, were not lost on a people who saw themselves as

oppressed by a latter-day 'Herod',<sup>23</sup> and who saw their children as being hunted down, imprisoned and/or killed by the soldiers, police officers and 'special' agents of the apartheid regime. Thus Kgalane, in addition to Herod, names Herod's soldiers and officers as the perpetrators of the infanticide. Further, while Kgalane foregrounds the saving, through the intervention of the Holy Spirit, of Jesus from Herod's agents, he remembers the many people 'who had just died' during the search for Jesus, in which *memoria passionis* we may well hear a reference to the many black South Africans who were killed during the search for Mandela (the 'Black Pimpernel' days) and the long years of his subsequent imprisonment. Kgalane's memorable summation, 'Satanic people were having Satanic thinkings,' may thus be taken as a commentary on the violent oppositionality evident in text of Matthew's gospel and the text (in the broadest sense) of Kgalane's South Africa. *That Jesus begins life as a refugee in Africa, his life in grave danger, may be seen as a decisive starting point for a grounded Christology of the dispossessed.* Further, that Jesus returns 'out of Egypt' to the land of his people, a uniquely Matthean emphasis, offers liberative possibilities for a Christology emerging in a context of violence and injustice, wherein Jesus, as many have noted, is seen as a second Moses.<sup>24</sup>

In sum, William Kgalane and Dikeledi Mashego offer us a wide window on the participatory relationality of grounded biblical hermeneutics. Employing the relational pathways of shared suffering, struggle and celebration they encounter and interpret the Moses and Jesus of the biblical text in the light of what they experience God to be doing in the life of Mandela and in their own lives, and in turn interpret what God is doing in their lives and times in the light of the Moses and Jesus of the biblical text. The Word of God is

<sup>23</sup> I first heard P.W. Botha referred to as 'Herod' in Katlehong Township (south-east of Johannesburg), where a woman working in the local Citizens' Advice Bureau of the Witwatersrand Council of Churches declared that Botha was 'ruling over the people like a Herod.' When Botha suffered his stroke early in 1989, more than one member of the Mothers' Union of my parish made reference to the way in which Herod died (cf. Acts 12:20-23), seeing it as an act of God. It is a damning reference: the Herods (the Great, Antipas, and Agrippa) are known in the biblical text for their violent opposition to the mission of God in Jesus Christ, and in the early church following Pentecost.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*, New York, 1977, p.50; Kelly Brown Douglas, *The Black Christ*, Maryknoll, N.Y., 1994, p.27; and Theo Witvliet, *The Way of the Black Messiah: The Hermeneutical Challenge of Black Theology as a Theology of Liberation*, translation by John Bowden, London, 1987, p.205. The roots of the Second Moses Christology lie in the Christianity of African-American slaves. As Douglas notes: 'The slaves seemed to transform Jesus into the Old Testament hero Moses. As Moses delivered the Israelites from bondage, Jesus would deliver the slaves. One observer (unsympathetic) of slave religion noted that Jesus Christ was considered 'not so much in the light of a spiritual Deliverer, as that of a second Moses' (Douglas 1994: 27, following Levine 1977: 50). Witvliet, also following the work of Levine, renders the point as follows: 'Moses occupied a special place, as the leader and liberator of the people ... However, most attention was paid to Jesus. The Old Testament, and especially the exodus story, forms the framework in which his appearance as messiah and liberator is set. Here the slaves had a biblical-theological insight which elicited from a white contemporary the scornful observation that they looked on Jesus as a second Moses' (1987: 205).

affirmed as an event, in particular a Christological event, liberative and transformative, happening and participated in across the text/interpreter distancing. Mandela's sacrifice is seen to be in the tradition of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, witnessing on the one hand to a Christology that finds its point of departure in the *memoria passionis Jesu Christi*, and on the other to a theology of Christian discipleship that takes as its point of departure the praxis of those who follow Jesus Christ along the *via crucis*. 'They are scarce, people like himself. This is all the might and power ... Mandela has sacrificed himself for us like Jesus Christ.' Thus are Jesus Christ and Mandela thanked, and the people seen to be empowered through their sacrifice. That Kgalane speaks of sacrifice in virtually the same breath as he sings and dances in celebration of liberation not only articulates but also incarnates what we have been calling the kinetic orality and combative spirituality of the TLRC communities, conjoining suffering and celebration, a theology of the cross and a theology of joy, in an enabling *borapedi* and praxis of land restitution. Further, Mandela's statement from the balcony of Cape Town's City Hall upon his release, 'I stand here before you not as a prophet but as a humble servant of you, the people. Your tireless and heroic sacrifices have made it possible for me to be here,' brings the issue of sacrifice full circle. It is in response to the sacrifice of those who fought for his own liberation that Mandela proclaims, 'I therefore place the remaining years of my life in your hands' (Mandela 1994: 555).

At this point Hildah Makogane, giving thanks to Jesus for 'the whole serious work that has been done,' introduces a legislative focus, foregrounding structure over personality. She celebrates the new laws, and advocates that they be obeyed because they 'are not suppressive' and are 'fair and just to everyone.'<sup>25</sup> In so saying she signals a move, critical for the success of the transition, from a culture of resistance to unjust rule to a culture of responsible citizenship in a state marked by just laws and legitimate government (cf. Botman 1994). Biblically, Hildah turns to the story of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10), a choice which dovetails neatly with Kgalane's emphasis on Jesus' coming to seek and save sinners, but which takes us further along the road that leads to the transformation of consciousness and structures. Not only is Zacchaeus a sinner, but he is a sinner whose repentance, following his scandalous encounter with Jesus, is of social and economic significance for his entire community:

**Hildah Makogane:** I also support all these statements, and thank Jesus for what happened. The whole serious work that has been done. I thank Jesus. Another thing is that we should

<sup>25</sup> The 'new laws' include the Acts which repealed the legislation of apartheid (e.g. the Land Acts of 1913 and 1936, the Group Areas Act, the Population Registration Act) and the Interim Constitution (1993), under which the country had voted.



obey the news laws, because these are not suppressive laws. These are laws that are fair, and just to everyone. We give thanks for that. Very much. It is true, even if I'm adding in the bible: a man, Zaccheu, he used to run and clamber over the tree because he heard that Jesus Christ was coming. When Jesus Christ came he went to the crowd and said to him, 'Clamber off! Come down! Because today I am your visitor.' Zaccheu clambered down off the tree. Some people were hurt and some people were happy. But he repented and gave back what he had taken.

There is a comparison I want to make now: that history, that issue, or vision, or that happenance of Zaccheu, really is *not* like L. Because L. is a leader, but the only thing is that he is only defending those who are his subjects. If you are not one of his subjects, you are not covered, protected by his security, or his salvation. But Jesus, he is defending everyone who is living on this earth. He is not segregating people according to their colours. So we are feeling ourselves to be very thankful. We thank God very much for these events, and we have to put our hope in that one of these days God is going to solve our problems. I'm praying for peace, for truth and for love. Because it has been long that we are fighting for this love and peace, but it is invisible. It has not appeared.<sup>26</sup>

The Zacchaeus story has been widely cited in South Africa, as in struggles for social justice elsewhere, as a text which links repentance with restitution and reparation (Tutu 1983; Lebacqz 1987; Rustenburg Declaration 1990). That Jesus would invite himself to the home of a 'chief tax collector,' described not only as rich but as 'very rich,' would indeed have seemed suspect, given his commitment to the poor and marginalised in Luke's gospel (cf. 4:18-19). The text records that all who saw it grumbled that Jesus had gone to be the guest of 'one who is a sinner.' As Hildah Makogane so eloquently puts it, 'Some people were hurt and some were happy.' Zacchaeus in particular is happy to welcome Jesus, and the contrast between Zacchaeus' happiness and the people's grumbling focuses our sense of tension. What is Jesus up to? While Zacchaeus shows himself to be highly motivated to get a look at Jesus (rich men and tax collectors are not often reported as 'clambering' up and down trees to see people) nothing in the text prepares us for Zacchaeus' repentance, which comes as a shock. Immediately following the notation of the people's grumbling (v.7), Zacchaeus, juxtaposed, 'stands there' and says to Jesus, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much' (v.8). Zacchaeus' declaration makes a dramatic and substantial linkage between the religio-cultural and the socio-economic, one for which there is ample precedent in the Hebrew Testament (cf. 2 Samuel 12:1-14, the confrontation of David by Nathan). We may note both a general clause of redistribution from a rich man to the poor, and a more specific clause wherein the tax collector is prepared to settle specific cases of fraud, declaring a fourfold restitution in each case as proven (indicated by the 'if' clause). Further, not only may repentance, redistribution and restitution be seen to be conjoined in the text, Zacchaeus himself is conjoined with this people.

<sup>26</sup> Leroro Interview, op cit., p.20.



As he announces, 'today salvation has come to this house,' Jesus affirms that 'he (Zacchaeus) too is a son of Abraham.' The inclusion of such a high-profile sinner, one whose sin was so obviously at the expense of his people, witnesses to the scandalous inclusivity of God's grace - a grace that enables reparation to be made and reconciliation to be effected. The gospel is good news to both oppressor and oppressed. Jesus, both Luke and Kgalane agree, came 'to seek out and to save the lost' and 'the sinners,' with direct import for personal and societal transformation - justice is indeed a relational term.

The relationality of repentance and restitution, reconciliation and belonging, receives strong support in Hildah Makogane's presentation and interpretation of the Zacchaeus story. When she moves to her 'comparison', it is the inclusivity of the salvation offered by Jesus in contrast with the exclusive ethnocentricity of the 'salvation' offered by L., that she highlights - an emphasis with obvious implications for the politics of the transition, marking a congruence, as did Kgalane, between the universality of God's grace as shown in Jesus Christ, and the universality of the new laws which also 'do not segregate according to colours.' Further, the relationality of social justice is again expressed in the language of love. 'I am praying for peace, truth and love,' says Hildah. Like Emelia Sedibe, her love language appears in a theological context; and like many, she is not at all convinced that peace and love have become manifest in the changes to date. 'It is long that we have been fighting for peace and love,' she says, 'but it is invisible. It has not appeared.' Her assessment is shared throughout the TLRC communities: there is a decided sense of the 'but not yet' in the already-but-not-yet of the transition, tending more to realism than idealism. *The elections may be celebrated, but as a point of departure, not as a point of arrival.*<sup>27</sup> We may note that Hildah is both praying for and fighting for peace and love. Her spirituality is one that witnesses to the hope, suffering and struggle of her people, which are in turn experienced as and understood to be bound up with the hope and suffering of God in their midst. God is hereby located at the centre of the relationality of the suffering, hope and struggle of her people. While the peace, truth and love grounded in that relationship are as yet invisible for Hildah, she nonetheless asserts their inclusivity in her prayers and theological-ethical discourse, for 'Jesus is defending everyone who is living on this earth.'

Returning to Hildah's biblical hermeneutics, we receive a rare glimpse into a second-order discourse on the way in which biblical narrative is viewed. Her statement, 'That history,

<sup>27</sup> A case in point is the prayer of an elder of the Diepkloof (Soweto) Congregation of the Presbiteri ea Gauteng ea Kereke ea Evangedi Lesotho. Opening a meeting of the Parish Konsistori not long after the April 1994 elections, he prayed: '... We thank you our God for the changes that we have seen in these days. But these changes leave us like yesterday so far' (translated from Sesotho).

that issue, or vision, or that happenance of Zaccheu,' witnesses to the relational hermeneutical freedom of a theology in the indicative. Indeed, one can imagine a seminar entitled 'The bible as history, issue, vision and/or happenance,' led by Hildah Makogane, Dikeledi Mashego, William Kgalane and Winus Nyathi, and attended by academic and pastoral theologians. Whether history or happenance, and whatever that distinction might be, Hildah narrates the story of Zacchaeus as if she had been there to see him climb the tree. Moreover, she is conscious of her role as narrator, introducing her biblical turn with the words, 'It is true, even if I'm adding in the bible.' With this announcement Hildah launches herself and her hearers along the journey of encountering the Word of God in her relation of the biblical story of Zacchaeus in post-election Leroro .

Winus Nyathi, for his part, speaks more directly of 'the history in the bible,' and affirms the same connection as does Dikeledi between 'the way it's written in the bible' and contemporary events in South Africa. For Winus, this mutual corroboration leads to 'a concrete hope' that 'God is existing' and that 'God is for us':

**Winus Nyathi:** We are aware of these events, what is happening in the earth. Even in the bible that's how it is written. It's written in that way. We, all people who believe that God was there, we should have that hope now that God is living! We should have a concrete hope that God is existing, and that God is for us. The events that are used to indicate this are still taking place even today, not like in the days of the whites. We start from scratch now to work, and pray to God, following God's plan. Not the old plan. We should pray God and do according to the way he showed us in the history in the bible.<sup>28</sup>

The theological ethics of Winus Nyathi are grounded in what he believes to be the verification in history, his history, of what is written in the bible: there is a direct relation between the events that indicate the existence and bias ('for us') of God in the bible and the events that indicate this 'even today.' For Winus 'today' is very specific: it is 'not like the days of the whites,' so recently past - it is a starting from scratch *now*. This new beginning is one which should depart sharply from the 'old plan' (of apartheid) and follow God's plan, which calls for work and prayer, *borapedi* and praxis, with the bible as guide. At the same time, there is a sense in which Winus' affirmation runs the risk of a too-literal tracking of correspondences between events in the biblical text and events in South Africa in 1994. The concrete hope that God exists, and exists for us, may well require for its concreteness more hermeneutical suspicion. At the moment of celebration there is a danger of loosing the necessary and creative tension between affirmation and suspicion in a grounded hermeneutics of liberation and

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<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.20.

transformation. When the cheering is over, and we (already) learn how long and difficult the road is on the way to uprooting the legacies of apartheid on the land, reversing the downward spiral of dispossession and poverty towards prosperity, the conjoining of suspicion and affirmation in local hermeneutics will be as necessary as ever.

#### **6.4 Concluding Summary: Texts in Community Struggles for Land Restitution**

The hermeneutical dimension of the *mayibuye* praxis of rural land-less communities is one that involves the interpretation of both ancestral and biblical texts within the inter-traditional *borapedi* of rural South Africans. The biblical hermeneutics of the three communities discussed in this chapter furthers our appreciation of the relational dynamics of a grounded hermeneutics, and supports the analysis that their biblical hermeneutics involves an interactive hermeneutical event in which contemporary individuals and communities engage with biblical individuals and communities across the text/interpreter distancing, and that this engagement follows relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering, struggle and celebration. The relationality is participatory and personal, with a narrative sense of autobiography and social biography playing a key role in the articulation of the hermeneutical engagement.

When Jeremiah laments the suffering of the people of Israel, the Moletele feel that it is their suffering he is witnessing to. Further, the God who brought Jeremiah's people back from exile to the land of their ancestors' bones is at work to help the Moletele return to their ancestral land in and around the Blyde River Canyon. Engaging personally in John's narrative of Jesus crossing the Kidron to struggle in Gethsemane with the sacrifice he is called to make, the Moletele feel that Jesus is crossing the Blyde River with them on the way to pray with them in the place of their ancestors, and to prepare for the struggle that awaits them. 'We will pray being free, we will be free to pray. We have managed to cross the Kidron. We have the Lord Jesus with us.' The relational pathways of suffering and struggle may further be seen to be at work in that it is the Kidron *en route* to Gethsemane and not the Jordan *en route* to the promised land that the Moletele see themselves as crossing. In Leroro one day later, however, the God who, early in the book of Exodus, feels the suffering of the children of Israel in Egypt is experienced as the God who feels also the suffering of the black rural South Africans forcibly removed from their land, distanced from their personal, familial and economic lifelines to it, and consigned to places of poverty. Moved to acts of liberation on Israel's behalf by such

compassion, the same God has also acted powerfully to liberate black South Africans from the oppression and exploitation of apartheid. 'The scriptures are happening today.' In Mandela God has called both a Moses to liberate his people and a Jesus to suffer for his people. 'The road to freedom is via the cross,' and the dancing of the Mapulana in Leroro is not far from their tears. In a grounded Christology the Jesus who ends up on the cross begins his life as a refugee in Africa, removed from his birthplace by the violence of those who rule his land. As for restitution, the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus, mediated by the oral reading of the text of Luke 19, is seen as possible today for those who have defrauded and dispossessed their neighbours - though such a transformation of consciousness unto restitution is rare and much to be prayed and fought for.

At the same time the relational hermeneutical pathways of suffering and struggle lead Nathan Modipa not to affirm a common experience of the God of compassion, sacrifice and liberation but to suspect that the God of the biblical text is a God who takes the side of those who dispossessed his people. The dispossessors continue to enjoy the blessing of such a God - for they continue to own the land of Modipa's forefathers. As for Adam, if he really was created from *adamah* he must therefore have been a white man. The text itself is white, having arrived in Africa with white men in the form of a book made by white men. The criticality of Modipa's biblical hermeneutics is grounded in the ongoing narrative history of suffering and struggle of his people, and serves notice of a grounded ideological critique of the Word of God as text. Modipa is closer to Mofokeng's 'incomprehensible paradox' and to Mosala's 'Word of God as ideological manoeuvre' than are the Moletete and the Mapulana of Leroro. His suspicion, 'a looking at from below,' will continue to be a necessary and inescapable aspect of a biblical hermeneutics grounded in the suffering and struggle of rural land-less communities for as long as they remain land-less, poor and marginalised from the enjoyment and empowerment of the community of *Modimo*, *badimo* and *batho* on the land.

There is a sense in which the participatory relationality of local biblical hermeneutics de-textualises the Word of God, enabling it to occur, to transpire, in their midst as an oral witness and medium. The Word of God happens as rural land-less communities make connections between the biblical story and their story, and experience in their lives the God of compassion and liberation to whom the biblical texts in the local lectionary of land restitution witness. Biblical hermeneutics in local struggles for land restitution are thus revealed to be an integral aspect of an empowering inter-traditional spirituality of resistance, return and renewal, wherein a compassionate God knows and may be known by those for whom the land is life.



## CHAPTER 7

### Women's Hermeneutics in Local Struggles for Land Restitution

The typical farmer in South Africa is a black woman with a baby on her back.

Rural Women's Movement

*Mma ngwana o tshwara thipa ka bogale* / The mother of the child holds the knife on the sharp side.

Motto, Rural Women's Movement

Yes, you may quote us. We have spoken the truth. So, no problem. Maybe some good will come from it.

Annie Joseph, Komaggas<sup>1</sup>

An ancestral hermeneutics of land restitution that is exclusively male in its tracing of genealogies, speaking only of the forefathers and forgetting or refusing to valorise the foremothers,<sup>2</sup> serves to reinforce the traditional patriarchy of customary law and practice concerning women and land, even as it is employed in community struggles to return to their land. This realisation presents rural black women with a strategic challenge: how to support the struggles of their communities for ancestral land while at the same time fighting internally against the patriarchy that inheres in an androcentric interpretation and practice of ancestral tradition with respect to land. As Esther Mombo has observed, 'Women in Africa were traditionally seen as part of the land a man inherits. How will women own land if their communities are using ancestral traditions to get it back?'<sup>3</sup> The incisive critique of traditional patriarchy being made by rural women demands that traditional ancestral hermeneutics hear the demand of rural women for gender-inclusivity and equality. That this demand is being resisted by many, but significantly not by all, men in the TLRC communities identifies perhaps the greatest challenge to the hermeneutics and praxis of local struggles for the restitution of ancestral land. As Louise Kretzschmar has observed, 'The much quoted Zulu expression of the

<sup>1</sup> Annie Joseph, Group Interview on Women and Land, Komaggas, Namaqualand, unpublished, 1 September 1994.

<sup>2</sup> In an irony I hope is instructive, a spell-check on the word 'foremothers' to see whether or not it was hyphenated resulted in the following guidance: the dictionary used in the Microsoft Word 6.0 programme did not know the word 'foremothers' and suggested that I change it to 'forefathers'. Similarly, the dictionary did not know the word 'Wilma' (as in Wilma Jakobsen) and suggested that I change it to 'William'.

communal nature of African culture, *umuntu u ngu muntu nga banye bantu*, or in Sotho *motho ke motho ka ba bangwe batho* ("a person is a person because of or in relation to others") is a case in point. Many black women are quick to point out that the theory of their value as persons within a community in terms of identity, status and role definition does not match up to their actual experience of life in these communities' (1995: 95). As argued above, an ancestral hermeneutics must be a critical hermeneutics if it is to be liberative and empowering for all members of rural communities. Differently put, an ancestral hermeneutics of land restitution cannot be done apart from a womanist hermeneutics of land restitution if indeed the return of people to land is to be truly restorative, and, with respect to gender, transformative of the community of land and people.

This chapter documents and discusses the irruption of 'womandla!', women's power, into the land agenda of rural black communities. Following a general introduction, we will consider the Women's Chapter of the *Land Charter*, a series of women's voices 'from the ground' in various rural communities together with male responses to their voices, the tradition of the earth as mother and of belonging as an umbilical relationship with mother earth, rural women's biblical hermeneutics, and feminist and womanist hermeneutics in more general terms in South Africa. In the event, the struggle of rural black women for an inclusive praxis of humanity is one of exceptional resilience and grace in the face of long years of many-layered suffering, with vital healing capacities for the long-broken community of women, men and land. Far from being a chapter 'tacked on' to the end of this thesis, the chapter on women's hermeneutics follows the African tradition of the most important people speaking last, with the obvious difference that in this case the chief voice is that of a woman.

### **7.1 Womandla!: Women's Hermeneutics and Praxis of Land Restitution**

As discussed in the introduction, the 'irruption within the irruption' of rural black women into the land agenda in South Africa has challenged systemic patriarchy, black and white, on the land, seeking to move us beyond the conflict of patriarchies (*Lefatse la bo 'Ntat'a Rona versus Die Vaderland*) in South Africa concerning land. Engaging in a critical praxis of women's empowerment in the areas of political representation at local, regional and national levels, land ownership and use, leadership skills, education and training, freedom from customary laws and practice concerning polygamy and the heritability of widows, the right to integrity of body and reproductive rights, basic needs (e.g. a clean and sufficient water supply

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Esther Mombo, Edinburgh, 3 November, 1994, p.1.

in their communities), and discursive power (e.g. political and theological), their empowerment has been both hermeneutical and practical. Rural women have united to share their stories, analyse their struggles and context in their own terms and voices, and to plan and act together (Rural Women's Movement 1994). The image of the ultra-exploited rural black woman made to suffer a triangulation of race, class and gender oppression, while an accurate and necessary analysis (Cock 1980; Grant 1994; Masenya 1994; Memela 1994), is in need of positive counter-images, equally valid, which seek to liberate and empower an oppressed consciousness - images which employ a hermeneutics both of suspicion and affirmation in the double task of deconstruction and reconstruction. The motto of the Rural Women's Movement, 'The mother of the child holds the knife on the sharp side,' together with its observation that, 'The typical farmer in South Africa is a black woman with a baby on her back,' are two such examples. While the images are of pain and weight, they are also images of strength and triumph through the pain, carrying the living weight of the present and future of their people. Further, the images signal the relationality of rural women's hermeneutics: the women are in relationship as mothers of children and as cultivators of the soil - a holistic relationality embracing the community of land and people whose name is life, and in which the images of mother and of mother earth are conjoined in an empowering vision of the birthing and maintenance, through struggle, of life.

At the same time, these images witness to an absence of men in rural life; their presence is one of implication (a child implies a father; that it is the mothers who hold the knife on the sharp side implies that the fathers do not). To the difficulties arising from the legacies of false fathers black and white we must thus add the ongoing challenge presented by absentee and migrant fathers who, upon their infrequent returns home, nonetheless expect to 'rule the roost' as if they had never been away. Discussing the reality on the ground for rural women, Lindiwe Ndlela of the NLC states:

The LAPC estimates that over 50% of rural households are headed by women. Women are responsible for looking after their families while their spouses are away working in the urban areas, as the migrant labour system dictates. They raise children and keep the family intact with very scant resources. The LAPC estimate that women produce 60% of the food consumed by rural households; contribute 80% of agricultural labour, mainly as unpaid family labour; and generate a third or more of all household income. Despite this contribution to the rural economy, women still cannot access political power.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Lindiwe Ndlela, 'Rural local government: women as an interest group,' in *Land Update* 52, October 1996, p.5. With respect to women in Africa as a whole, Rose Waruhiu, a former Kenyan MP, presents a similar picture, 'Women carry a disproportionate load in Africa. They do 95% of domestic work, and in rural areas 85% of weeding, 60% of harvesting, 50% of caring for livestock, 50% of planting and 30% of ploughing. Women's economic participation is not matched by supporting mechanisms, for example the access and right to productive assets, credit, technology and other resources. They lack training, form the majority of the illiterate and the poor, and are by-passed, institutionally and socially, when decisions are being made. They need a mechanism that

While rural women remain less organised in their own right than farmers and farmworkers, or are subsumed in farmers' and farmworkers' unions without being recognised as equal partners by male members (Ndlela 1996:5-6), it is also true that rural women have begun to make inroads into the political and economic preserves of rural patriarchy, supported legislatively by the New Constitution and practically by their own organisational initiatives. Increasingly, men are running into a united discourse and praxis of *womandla!* As Mrs Mabongo says to her suspicious and indignant husband in the 1995 musical *Marabi*, 'I work hard to put food on this table! God gave me two hands - I can plough for myself!'<sup>5</sup> At the same time, as will be discussed below, the goal of *womandla!* is not a counter-exclusivity in socio-economic and political spheres but a holistic relational inclusivity with the power to heal the brokenness of male and female on and with the land. It is to an exploration and consideration of the voices of rural black women that we now turn.

## 7.2 Reading the Women's Chapter in the Land Charter

In the *Land Charter* adopted at the Community Land Conference the demands of the Commission on Women and Land appear as chapter four.<sup>6</sup> Under the summary heading, 'Women must be able to own land, and have equal rights in all areas of their lives,' the chapter reads as follows:

Noting that women constitute the majority of our rural population and carry the heaviest burden of discrimination because of their status as historically disadvantaged people, we must, in order to address the issue of women and land rights, examine the past and confront the obstacles that stand in the way of women acquiring land.

We therefore propose and demand the following:

1. Women should be able to own land whether they are married or single. And married couples should have their houses registered in the names of both spouses. Women and men should have the same rights to land. [accepted]
2. Women should have equal representation with men on local government. [accepted]
3. There should be no discrimination against women in inheritance rights. [accepted]
4. Polygamy must be abolished. Women must no longer be forced into polygamous marriages to get land because they cannot get land under customary law. [debated at length, not accepted in plenary - it stands as a demand of the women's commission of the CLC]
5. Women should benefit from development programmes and be targeted for training. There should be special training centres and adult education courses geared for women.

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really links them to the benefits of development, especially in agriculture, the environment, income-generation, health and reproduction ... Women remain producers, managers and mothers without proportionate reward' (Waruhiu 1995: 137).

<sup>5</sup> Junction Avenue Theatre Company, *Marabi*, 1995.

<sup>6</sup> As noted above, the *Land Charter* was compiled from demands agreed to by the representatives of 353 landless and rural communities (two delegates per community: one man and one woman) at the Community Land Conference on 12 February 1994 in the Bloemfontein City Hall.



- [accepted]  
 There should be regional or local health care workers. [added as an amendment and accepted]
6. Women living on farms must have secure places to live. [accepted]
  7. There should be special housing subsidies for women who cannot afford to buy or rent houses or pay rent. Housing subsidies to assist women who are single parents must be introduced. [accepted]
  8. A ministry of women's affairs should have offices in every local government office and at regional level to ensure that women's rights are protected. [accepted]
  9. Land should be set aside for communities facilities which benefit women, such as crèches, community gardens and women's training centres. [accepted]
  10. Women want there to be sufficient schools in all areas. There must be free and compulsory education for our children, and sufficient sports fields. [accepted]
  11. Women want safe places to go if we or our children are abused. [accepted]
  12. Women do not want their husband's brother to get involved if their husband dies. They do not want to be inherited by their husband's brothers. [debated at length, not accepted in plenary - it stands as a demand of the women's commission of the CLC]

Further, the concluding chapter of the *Land Charter*, entitled 'The Way Forward,' recognises the need for women themselves to bring their demands to fruition:

- 9.6. We must build women's forums in our regions to discuss land issues, and organise women at local and regional level to make sure that women's concerns are addressed. [accepted]

The debates on women and land at the CLC lived on in the memories of the participants for some time. Emma Mashinini, for example, following a meditation by the author based on Numbers 27:1-11 (the daughters of Zelophehad) at morning prayers at Khotso House (SACC Head Offices) one month after the conference, observed with painful irony:

When we went to the CLC we went together as men and women to fight for our land. But when we got there it was painful to see how divided we really were. It was very interesting to see where the men spent their energy. When the debate on polygamy came up, the men spent their energy on getting more wives. They spent more energy on getting wives than on getting land!<sup>7</sup>

Behind Emma Mashinini's statement is a lifetime of struggle, which has taught her that it is has been women who have suffered most in the forced removal of their people from their land:

My experience of being a woman is the experience of being always a victim, from the time of that first forced removal of my family. Women and children have always been the most affected by these forced removals because they are the people on the spot who are there when the bulldozers come. At a recent conference for women in the Anglican Church the most important thing that emerged was the issue of the land. Many white people could not understand what this issue has to do with women. But the experience of black women is that the land is central. Women in the South African context are the ones who plough the land in rural areas. For them land is closely bound up with survival. It is often the main source of

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<sup>7</sup> Emma Mashinini, Khotso House, Johannesburg, 4 March, 1994.

food for their families, while the men are away in the cities. In the apartheid structures, when we are moved from pillar to post, everyone suffers, but the one who suffers most is the woman (Mashinini 1991: 345).

Commenting on the saying that became the motto of the RWM, Emma observes:

In Sotho there is a saying, '*Mme a tshoara thipa ka bohale*,' which means, 'A mother holds the knife even on the sharp side.' The sacrifices our women have made and the pain they have borne have been great, even if they are not standing on the platforms now. Men are now dominating the structures of the progressive political parties, and although I do not believe in quotas or percentages I do believe that women must fight for their rightful equality of representation in these power positions (1991: 348).

Emma then exhorts women to take a leading role in the struggle for the land; it is a gender issue as well as a race and class issue. Further, she relates the struggle of women for land both to her Christian faith and to the traditional community of people and ancestors grounded at graveside:

Women must not see the issue of land as belonging to a man's world. We have suffered so much that we forget at times how important land is to the needs of women in South Africa. There can be no solution of South Africa's social problems unless the issue of the land is resolved. This is the issue that rings true with ordinary black women in many parts of the country. Those who own the land now, and are surrounded by the land, forget that they own that land at the expense of others. They prefer to ignore the issue and hope it will disappear. Christians say that this has nothing to do with their faith or that it is not the concern of the church. But it is a church-related issue! Where must God's children live, if they are deprived of their land? Land represents food and security for God's dispossessed people, and indeed for many it is the place of the graves of their ancestors. At present it is a commodity available to only a few (1991: 348-349).

It is a statement that conjoins religio-cultural and socio-economic and political analysis, and which relates *borapedi* to praxis in compelling fashion. At the same time, Emma Mashinini is at pains to tell white analysts of black women's struggles that it is not for them to exploit a black womanist critique of black patriarchy for their own interests (1991: 350-351). With this as a caution, let us proceed to a consideration of women's voices in the TLRC communities, and of men's responses to them.

### **7.3 Women and Land: Voices from the Ground**

My research in each community included a group interview with women, and with those men who were sufficiently interested and/or suspicious, designed to follow up the women's chapter in the *Land Charter* and the debates at the CLC on polygamy and the heritability of widows (points 4.4 and 4.12) insofar as they pertained to the ongoing struggles of rural women for land. In each case the CLC debates were summarised, with input from

community delegates to the CLC where possible, and chapter four of the *Land Charter* was read. The responses elicited ranged over a wide autobiographical and analytical terrain, including heart-breaking personal stories,<sup>8</sup> the vagaries of customary law and practice concerning women and land, and the practice of families, in general and in particular, with respect to questions of inheritance and gender (see discussion below). A second stage in these group interviews saw us turn our attention to the biblical hermeneutics of the women, with particular, though not exclusive, reference to the text of Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-13, the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, who successfully petitioned Moses for their father's land allocation to be granted to them in the absence of a son. In what follows I seek to document a representative selection of the socio-ethical discourse of women and men in rural communities with respect to the struggle of women for land and 'for equal rights in all areas of their lives.' In this, it should be remembered that the demands contained in chapter four of the national *Land Charter* came from the ground through a participatory and consultative process at local and regional levels. Thus, taking chapter four back to the communities for consideration may be seen to be in continuity with that process, helping to facilitate a second round of articulation and debate at the local level in consultation with local branches of the Rural Women's Movement or with local women's leaders in community land committees and church structures.

<sup>8</sup> Mrs Nyepedi Catherine Moseamedi, in oral testimony in support of the Mashilane Land Claim lodged with the CRLR, narrates her personal *memoria passionis* in graphic detail. She speaks of the events surrounding her eviction from the farm Rietvley 413 KT by a white farmer whom she names as Mathibisi van Niekerk: 'I was born near Bohlalapeba, which is between Clermont and Rietvley, on 14 April 1928. The village is called Tshokwaneng (Rietvley). My father's name was Maunyatlala Mashego, who was born at Rietvley. His father was Langwane Mashego, who was also born at Rietvley. That is their land. My mother's name was Metoi Mosoma, who was born at Boroka, near Makhutjwe.

I grew up at Rietvley. I was working for Mathibisi van Niekerk. We were harvesting tobacco and picking potatoes, and doing all the duties of farm life. Loading the lorries, for example. One day I was afraid to climb up on top of the lorry. I ran away home. Van Niekerk came on his horse and he whipped me with his sjambok. He said: Why do you run away when I say you have to work! Then he whipped me and I had to go back to work. And I was pregnant at that time! It did not matter. And it did not matter how hard they whipped you - you had to go back to work. I had run to a tree. When I lay down in the shade of the tree he found me and whipped me. The other women who were there said: Can't you see she is pregnant! But he did not care - he whipped me any way. There was a law on that farm that said that because getting pregnant meant that you would be unable to work, you were not allowed to be pregnant. That is why he whipped me. The child with whom I was pregnant was born the next month. Her name is Mamphefadu [*phefadu* is the colour black; the name means a black mother]. She is still alive. Was she born prematurely? No, on time. So, yes, I was eight months pregnant when he whipped me. We did not stay even two months after that. Mathibisi [van Niekerk] chased us away. We took everything. That was after Mamphefadu was born. We made a sled [*travois*] and the pots that we put there broke Mamphefadu's hand as we were chased from there. It was a month after I was whipped that I gave birth to Mamphefadu. And it was a month after that we left. It was my husband and his two wives: myself and the first wife, whose name was Sesi. The children? Sesi had two children - two had passed away in infancy and two were still alive. I had three children, Potoka and Botse, my sons, and Mamphefadu. When we left the farm of Mathibisi we went to Sterkspruit Number 2, which is Phiring. We have stayed there up to today.

The graves? We have many graves at Rietvley. My grandfather is there, together with my grandmother, for example. Compensation? Nothing! Not a tick! We have been beaten so much - especially when I was pregnant! I can never forget that! Trekpassees? I do not have one. I do not think we ever got one. He just

### 7.3.1 Mam Lydia Kompe, MP

The basic issue of rural women having and finding their voice, *contra* any ascription of 'voicelessness', was addressed in an interview with Mam Lydia Kompe, MP whose work with rural women as a fieldworker with TRAC beginning in 1986 may be said to have founded the Rural Women's Movement:

**Q:** The question of voicelessness comes up often in this research I have been doing with rural communities ... But I have been asking myself: are women voiceless? Or is it that women have a voice, and it's an articulate voice, but it's a problem of hearing the voice? A problem of men not listening. As far as I have experienced them, rural women are not voiceless! It's a problem more with the hearing than the articulation.

**Lydia Kompe:** I think that's very important, what you are saying. That the women have the skill of voicing out their grievances, their needs. But they're actually talking to deaf ears. Because men are actually - they have, I think they have fears. Fears of losing their patriarchal power. And they think that women are challenging them to take away their power. And that's not what we are saying.

**Q:** No, it is rather a sharing -

**Lydia Kompe:** We don't want to be seen as men in skirts. We don't want that kind of *manpower*. We need the power which gives the status of *womanhood*, you know?

**Q:** Yes.

**Lydia Kompe:** That's what we need. We don't want to see ourselves being women with manhood, you know, that kind of ridiculous power. We don't want it.

**Q:** Not a new exclusiveness for women, but together, inclusiveness.

**Lydia Kompe:** Exactly.

**Q:** That's what I've been hearing on the ground.

**Lydia Kompe:** Exactly. So we need equality in all spheres. Be it in the home, women also have to have a voice. Be it in the churches, be it in the schools, in education, in the (government) departments, all the departments, we need a proper integration and equality.<sup>9</sup>

Mam Lydia's insistence that the goal of the women's struggle is not the gaining of a male form of power-having, 'not that ridiculous kind of power,' but the 'power ... of womanhood,' and 'equality in all spheres' is an importance aspect of the rural women's vision. In a way which recalls the critical willingness of TLRC communities to share the land with white farmers who are prepared in turn to share their inclusive vision of a new South Africa, rural women articulate both a scalding critique of patriarchy and a critically inclusive vision of gender equality in the home, the workplace, schools, churches and in political decision-making bodies at all levels. Important in rural women's rejection of a counter-exclusivity is their holistic approach to human relationality, expressed in a strong and transformative commitment to the community of women, men, children, God and the land. That the 'Message of the ANC to Rural Communities,' issued as part of its 1994 election campaign, placed women's concerns at the top of its list of promises concerning the land issue is indicative both of the gains that

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chased us (oral testimony recorded by D.S. Gillan, translated by Phillip Mohlapisi, Matibidi, Blydepoort, Mpumalanga, 09 July 1996).



women have made within the struggle for liberation and transformation, and the ongoing need to build on those gains. 'Land belongs to the people as a whole,' the statement affirms. 'To make this a reality there are many changes needed. Together with the people in rural areas, an ANC government will do the following: 1) guarantee women equal rights to land, equal rights as workers and give women special assistance' (ANC 1994b). The challenge for Lydia Kompe, now an ANC MP, is to help to translate and interpret Parliamentary discourse for rural women and, perhaps more important, to translate the discourse of rural women for Parliament and governmental departments. The goal of 'a proper integration and equality' is far from being achieved at any level: local (e.g. familial, educational, agricultural, entrepreneurial, ecclesiastical, financial, judicial, political), regional (e.g. Provincial Legislatures) or national (e.g. Parliament, Government Ministries).<sup>10</sup>

### 7.3.2 Caroline Tladinyane and Maria Mthopi, Mogopa

The interview with Mam Lydia was conducted on the auspicious occasion of the *Mokete* of the Bakwena ba Mogopa on 8 October 1994, called to celebrate the return of their second farm and to witness the ploughing of the first furrow by the new Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom. In a group interview in Mogopa three months earlier, when the issue of women and land was raised, it was the struggle of women for an equal voice in community decision-making bodies, the right to own land, and the strength and ability of women to play leadership roles at local, regional, national and international levels that were the foci of women's concerns:

**Caroline Tladinyane:** Women must have the right to participate in all of the affairs concerning the village, and throughout the country and the world! Even in the making of laws women must be involved. Also, women must have the right to own land, whether that woman is married or not. Because that is very important to us.

**Q:** Can you tell us your basis for speaking this way?

**Caroline Tladinyane:** It is based on the claim that women must have the right to speak on all matters, for example law and government. And men must support our right to do so.

**David Kgatitsoe:** Yes, women must have the rights. We must be equal. Not that men must oppress or pressurise women.

**Maria Mthopi:** Women must be given due respect. Women must be given a hearing in all areas. Women must be involved in the government of the village, and in the making of laws which govern the village. A woman must be so strong that she can be an example, even to outside villages, to men and women both. She can be invited by them to give speeches, and help them progress in whatever way they want to go. She must be so powerful and influential

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mam Lydia Kompe, Mogopa, unpublished, 8 October, 1994, p.3.

<sup>10</sup> The ongoing conflict within the ANC Women's League, for example, has largely nullified that body's effectiveness with respect to the empowerment of women on the ground. At the same time it is important to acknowledge progress, particularly in Parliament, where 107 of 400 MPs, 15 of 90 Senators and both the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are women, mainly as a result of the policy decision of the ANC that one third of its MPs will be women. Further, at present 4 of 26 cabinet ministers, and 7 of 14 deputy ministers are women (statistics as of 03 October 1996, from the Chief Whip, ANC).

that she can take part even outside her area, where she can contribute to others - in the field of agriculture for example, or in any other field. That kind of influence. Any office previously awarded only to men must be shared now by men and women. So that people can see that in any venture men and women are united in doing it.<sup>11</sup>

Tladinyane, who was one of the delegates from Mogopa to the CLC, and Mothopi articulate a comprehensive vision of women's empowerment (women empowering women) and participation in the legislative, governmental, educational and agricultural life of their communities and societies. Again, with respect to holistic relationality, it is important to note that it is the sharing of power, and of the offices of power, that is envisaged; it is an equal union of men and women 'in any venture' that is sought.

### 7.3.3 Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, ASCA

Indicative of the gap, however, between the articulation and the realisation of a vision, Kenosi Mofokeng of ASCA was careful to indicate that the establishment of democratic structures was itself is no guarantee that women would not continue to be oppressed by an enduring patriarchy with respect to questions of land ownership and heritability:

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** And of course, another thing: I have no problem with democratic structures as long as they do not deprive women of their rights. Because usually you find that, like here in the townships, you find that when a man dies everything must belong to the son.

**Q:** Right.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** And the son has got to marry in order to inherit that. And you are there! It was your house, with your husband -

**Q:** Being the wife -

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Yes! But because you are not recognised as a human being, you are just one of those tools! When he dies you become a nobody!

**Q:** A tool?!

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Yes you are a tool!

**Q:** To do what? Cook -

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Just to cook, clean, give birth - that's all! That's why the children are not yours, they're his!

**Q:** Aow. So you say the move to democratic structures is good as long as the rights of women are given their proper recognition.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Oh yes! Oh yes! What was ours, when you passed away what was yours is mine!

**Q:** Yes.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** After all, these white weddings say we marry on community of property. But once you die it's no longer community of property, because the property now has to be confiscated or be given to a son. Why should it go to a son?!<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Group Interview with Members of the Mogopa Community, Mogopa, unpublished, 30 June 1994, pp.9-10.

<sup>12</sup> Interview with Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, Braamfontein, unpublished, 20 September, 1994, p.18.

Kenosi Mofokeng's presentation of a woman 'not as a human being' but as 'just one of those tools ... to cook, clean give birth' is one of the most painful statements made during the course of the research. There is a deep and urgent need beyond that which can be expressed in words, or understood by a male theologian, for what Denise Ackermann has called a 'relational anthropology' and a 'transformative view of humanity which wants not only a newly integrated self, but a newly integrated social order' (Ackermann 1991: 100).

#### 7.3.4 The Rural Women's Movement in Driefontein

The theological hearing on women and land in Driefontein, organised in consultation with Mam Beauty Mkhize, then president of the RWM, and widow of Saul Mkhize, provided a powerful articulation of the grievances of rural women, and a compelling, and at times highly entertaining, example of the way in which a shared commitment to an inclusive vision of gender equality on the land can evolve:<sup>13</sup>

**Wilhemina Shabangu:** We being women, we do actually want to have our own land also. Because we don't want to be disturbed. In the case of my husband passing away, and then somebody else is supposed to take over, because I am having no place anymore where to stay, and I'm obliged to be under his rule - we don't want this!

**Q:** Thank you. May I ask: what is your foundation for this view? What can you bring to support your view?

**Mam Beauty Mkhize:** I can bring a concrete foundation. It happens that my husband is late. And then when he had passed, it was decided by the family that our son was to take over. And after taking over, he will have his own wife. And then whilst now these two married people, now actually they'll take me as a stranger, and I'll be treated in a bad way. They won't actually take any concern. And this will be in my place, which was built, created by me.

**Q:** So in that case you feel that your rights as a person were not being respected.

**Mam Beauty Mkhize:** They are no longer respected.

**Trusty Manama:** As is taken for granted: after a husband has passed away, and the elder brother is to take over, and that elder brother is having about two wives, or ten wives!, and then *she is to fall into that queue*, to add on top of those many wives!!!!?? What really hurts me is this. If in case I possess something - let's say it's a cow - that cow is to be divided among the ten wives!! Whatever I possess which is actually mine, it is to be divided for the whole of the wives!

**Q:** All this just because you are a woman.

**Trusty Manama:** Yes!

**Q:** If you die and your husband carries on, your husband gets to keep everything. The husband's possessions are not divided among others.

**Lemon Ntozini:** No, his goods would not be distributed.

**Trusty Manama:** Yes.

**Q:** And you are saying that you don't agree with that.

**Trusty Manama (and others):** Yes!

**Q:** You are saying it is time for equality of rights.

<sup>13</sup> Intended initially to be a small-group session with four to five members of the RWM in Driefontein, the hearing attracted some forty women and eight men. The balance of discursive power between women and men in the hearing was tipped in favour of the women - a situation which, in the event, enabled both the men and the women present to speak and be heard. This was in marked contrast to the case in Dingleydale, as discussed below.



**Trusty Manama:** Yes! On this point I do stand firm. I stand firm on this point! So if my husband dies, I must stay with my kids. So that nobody is to control whatever we possess. It's only us, we are to say.<sup>14</sup>

Thus far the points raised recall the debate at the CLC closely. Women are asserting their right to own land in their own names, without their rights to land having to go through a man (husband, brother-in-law, son). Their demands are founded on their concrete experiences of suffering and struggle within their families and communities. Trusty Manama's articulation of polygamy and heritability as a 'queue' of oppression stands as one of the most striking images heard in the course of the research.

At this point Baba Dlangamandla, well advanced in years and clearly one of the senior elders of the community, intervenes. His style as a story-teller is unsurpassed, not least in his ability to hold us in suspense concerning where he is headed with his speech. It begins with a valorisation of Zulu tradition concerning women and land and then moves to a more critical assessment of the current (corrupt) state of that tradition, which leads him in turn to express his support, '100%', for the struggle of rural women for land:

**Baba Dlangamandla** (app. 80 years old): In the first place I feel that I am getting disturbed, especially in my heart, when such matters are being discussed. Because we are stating these matters to someone who is not of our culture. According to the way we convey the matter, you'll not understand clearly our history. It seems as if - it may come to the mind that you may think that we were born being enemies of such an issue. To all the commentators, no-one has come yet with the real point, stating that: before, how good was this issue, and how bad was it, and why was it bad, and what was the cause?

According to my youth, the matter of a husband taking his brother's wife, after he had passed, it was something which was favoured, and it was good. Because according to tradition mankind did not usually mention this as a situation wherein he would say that this is my wife. He was told and it was really confirmed and stated clearly to him that this is *not* your wife. That is why, during that time, the person who has entered that house (the brother entering the house of the deceased husband) is not to take hardly a penny. Hardly a penny of that house of the deceased. His duty which he was to do after entering that house, it was actually [quiet laughter] to continue to provide, to assist, in providing the children [laughter]. And the children of the home, even the wife, I will say the whole family, will stand firmly having that hope and that trust that actually we are having the father.

When actually conceiving, it's true, the family used to gather. Then one of the children of the deceased, the elder one, this elder son, or elder child, will be instructed that he must take out the cow, from the kraal and give it to the father, to the new father. Because his duty was finished. He had done his duty. Now, what was this cow paying? According to our origins, we used not to have the bed where to sleep. So we said the cow was paying for the knees [laughter].

[He now gets down from his chair onto his hands and knees, and moves his hips forwards and backwards. There is loud laughter at this!]

According to our culture we used not to have beds, but people used to use knees, to kneel on their knees. Now this cow, it was stated that this cow was paying the knees.

<sup>14</sup> Theological Hearing on Women and Land, Driefontein, South-Eastern Transvaal, unpublished, 25 August, 1994, pp.4-5.



Because theses people are -

[The translator is embarrassed to say it]

Q: I think I understand!

[Laughter]

**Lemon Ntozini:** You understand? That's good!

[Laughter]

**Baba Dlangamandla:** When the son has grown up, he also gets married. That will be the day now that the family will take the son to the kraal. Now the purpose of taking the son to the kraal - it's a day when they are giving privilege and opportunities to the son to use on the estate of the place. They'll give him a stick, which used to be carried by his father. Now the step-father (second father) - he is having his own family. When doing things, for example, customary feasts, there is nothing the son will do without consulting the step-father. If in cases where the step-father is just as I am, that will give this family to be firm. It's like an eye to see that the property in this family is not to be spoiled. Whatever has been given to the son, he's not to spoil it in any way. But before the step-father is being admitted to that house, it is pointed out to him all the things which need to be done. It must be sure that all the things shown to him as being wrong have been put right. Then the family will thank him.

Because this family was running away from this point. [translator silent before translating this]. Because the mother was having three children or more. This mother may go outside and have some children from other surnames. Not of this home. Let's say the surname of this family was highly respected - it was not to be mixed with other surnames. The privileges have been given to the son - at the time he is taken to the kraal.

[Some women react negatively at this point.]

The privileges - the purpose was so that he could be shown what was wrong and what was right. And then, for that matter, even the wife of the deceased cannot go astray. Because the son won't accept any gentlemen, or any old men coming into this house. Because now everything is in the hands of the son.

As for me, being Dlangamandla, if I do see the actions of the mothers, of the women, fighting against this point, which is stated to be polygamy, I do agree 100% with them. Because it is no longer like it was previously.

[The women all clap at this point.]

On that point I do agree. The last point is that we have been created by God. All of us, we are human beings. Let's forget about gender, about male and female, and about colour and race. Let's forget about all that. When we come to the issue of land. Because even every creature which has been created by God has been created by God to have the place here on earth. I do agree that even the wives, the women, are to get the land as far as they can. I Dlangamandla. Thanks a lot.

[The women clap vigorously again.]

That is why I do say I make a salute to the women, if they say: no we reject this. Because now it is a beast. It's no longer as it was before. As I see it, it is as if now they are being brought on to a better life. They may indeed live a better life. I don't know. I cannot comment quite so much. Because my days are not so long.

Q: Thobela! (Thank you!)

**Baba Dlangamandla:** Thobela!<sup>15</sup>

Baba Dlangamandla supplies two reasons for supporting the women in their rejection of polygamy and the heritability of widows. First, the traditions of polygamy and heritability, once worthy of respect and compliance in his view, have now 'become a beast,' and the women are thus right to reject them. Second, in a theological ethics that takes creation as its point of

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, pp.5-7, 9.

departure he sees humanity, male and female, black and white, as equal before God their maker. The land must be shared among all because every creature created by God must have a place. Thus Dlangamandla agrees that 'women are to get the land as far as they can,' and that the path that they are following may well lead them to 'a better life' - though he remains unsure of this, and does not expect to see it in his own lifetime. There is a sense in which his creation ethic recalls that of Archbishop Tutu, in that its implications for basic human rights are elaborated both in terms of gender and of race, marking a significant advance on the often-heard argument of men in the 1980s that the struggle of women was 'deflecting our struggle for liberation.' Later in the hearing Baba Dlangamandla added a third, more pragmatic, reason for supporting the struggle of women for land and equal rights - that of their contribution to the survival and health of the community. 'You would be surprised to see what the women have done right here,' he stated with pride, 'Even the trees you see here, you'll find that they the women have planted them. The same women. With the child on the back. For that reason I think that the time has come to an end when they can be pushed backward, backward, backward.'<sup>16</sup> The spontaneous clapping for Baba Dlangamandla, and good-natured laughter when he proclaimed that he would have to be off because he 'had to go and chop wood for his wife,' was a moving experience of mutual hearing and healing. While much ground remained to be covered (e.g. with respect to the reproductive rights and inheritance rights of women), what was emerging was a mutual commitment to making the journey together - a mutual commitment that was not evident in many of the communities (see Dingleydale below).

At this point the saying of the Rural Women's Movement that 'The typical South African farmer is a black woman with a baby on her back,' was recalled, to which Mam Beauty Mkhize held up a copy of the book entitled *The Rural Women's Movement*, which she co-authored with Mam Lydia Kompe. As the women spoke of their experiences, it was agreed all around the circle that the women, as they looked at each other, were looking at farmers, whose working of the land gave them a right to that land.

### 7.3.5 An Attempt to Break Through Male Discursive Power in Dingleydale

In contrast to the theological hearing on women and land in Driefontein, a similar session in Dingleydale, a former 'betterment scheme' in the Northern Province Lowveld, was an exercise in male discursive power, with the women present breaking through to speak only after extended and at times heated debate between and among the men concerning the question of women and land, and the question of whether women should be allowed to address the topic

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<sup>16</sup>ibid., p.15.

themselves. Some men, ludicrously, spoke at length concerning why they thought women should be heard on the subject only to give way to another man with a similar argument, thus further blocking the women from being heard in their own voice. When they did finally speak, it was in short, devastating interventions. We begin with the opening exchange between Willis Ngobe and Lion Chiloane, whom we have met earlier in discourse on the topic of the conflict of patriarchies in ancestral hermeneutics:

**Willis Ngobe:** It is not the first time that I get information that women also want to have a share in life. But myself I've got reasons for refusing, for differing with them with respect to this matter. But that should not be seen as if I am undermining women, that I differ with them, with their ideas. It's just my opinion.

What I know since I was born, from my childhood to now, when I look at the life of the women, I never actually came across more than 10 or 5 women who can have leadership skill, or who can have experience in advising other people or leading other people. When it comes to that level of having equal say, I start to undermine, because I know that these people are not more clever (*bohlale*) than I am. I don't want to compare with any person anywhere but I want to direct this to my family - my mother herself. When I was young and growing up, I never discovered or found her doing things in the family that my father wanted, the way that my father wanted. Even up to 75%. But from my family to another people outside, I have just discovered that this point is the same. So if now today here they want to have a say, where do they want to lead us and how!? There is a Pedi saying you should know: 'A herd led by a female cow will fall in the *donga* (ravine).'

**Lion Chiloane:** I wish to address this topic. But first I want to say that today's gathering is a very serious gathering ... Now, I will assist a little on this matter - the matter of women. I would be happy if there was a great number of women here. Because we build each other up, we help each other. This matter of women is a very difficult one for us as people (*batho*). For all of us, black and white, as human beings. Because originally when God created women he was actually making a person who was going to be my friend. He was making a friendship, so that she must please me. He didn't mean that women should come and control. Now, because of this story of Zelofkade [his name in the Sotho translation], what happened there is that the daughters of Zelofkade have given their complaint to Moses. But Moses didn't answer them directly because he was in a difficult position. He felt that this matter is difficult for him. He told them that your matter is a very difficult one, I will give it to my Lord. So Moses gave the matter to God. Jehovah answered Moses that the daughters of Zelofkade are asking a very important thing. Don't deny them the right. There I conclude.<sup>17</sup>

There is contrast if not conflict between the responses of Ngobe and Chiloane. Where Ngobe quotes Pedi tradition, Chiloane quotes the bible. While both are androcentric sources, and both are quoted in support of a patriarchal approach to the demand that women own land in their own right, there is at least an opening in the Genesis (1:27; 2:19-25) and Numbers (27:1-11) traditions for a reading against the androcentricity of the text which the Pedi tradition seems not to admit of. Before he gets to the Pedi saying, however, Ngobe does not scruple to cite the dynamics between his own father and mother in support of his opposition to

<sup>17</sup>Group Interview with Dingleydale Farmers, Eastern Transvaal Lowveld, unpublished, 6 April 1994, pp.5-6.

the proposed equality of women. Generalising on the basis of his parents' relationship, Ngobe asserts an intellectual superiority of men over women; in at least 75% of all cases the woman will not be more clever than the man. For Ngobe, the primary criterion for judging a woman's fitness to lead in society seems to be whether or not she does what her husband wants her to do, and in the way he wants her to do it. It is of relevance for Ngobe's speeches, and for a sense of the social context of these exchanges as a whole, that Dingleydale and the surrounding Lowveld is a context in which women are expected to show traditional forms of respect to their men, and for the most part do so. For example, one often sees a woman kneeling down to her husband and waiting to be acknowledged before she addresses him. A guided tour of Willis Ngobe's tomato fields (his 1.3 hectare plots, see above) included an introduction to some of his workers - all women. When his forewoman left her co-workers in the field to come and speak to him she knelt down in the furrow with her head down before speaking.

Chiloane, while his image of woman-as-person-who-is-my-friend allows us a moment of respite in the patriarchal discourse, makes it clear that woman-as-friend was created 'so that she must please me' and not to 'come and control.' With respect to the story of the daughters of Zelophehad, Chiloane braves an interpretation that acknowledges divine sanction for the daughters to receive their father's land allocation in the absence of a son, but does so only after emphasising the extremely problematic nature of the daughters' 'complaint'. Chiloane tells us no less than three times in his short narration just how difficult a position Moses felt himself to be in; hence the appeal to Jehovah, a higher court. Thus, while he repeats Jehovah's verdict, 'Don't deny them the right,' Chiloane has covered his back, as it were. The issue of women and land is too difficult a matter for mere mortals, even Moses had difficulty - so what can a poor man from Dingleydale do? Yet, given that it is with the words, 'don't deny them the right,' that Chiloane concludes, we may discern an small opening in his speech for dialogue, an opening not easily perceived in Ngobe's speech.

That it was Ngobe's approach that received the strongest support from the men present will come as no surprise. The most disturbing speeches were those wherein men asserted the male domination of both women and land in explicitly sexual images, testifying thereby to a many-layered oppression. For example, in response to the suggestion that some people view the land as 'mother earth,' Elias Phokane, who found the idea difficult at first, found a way to understand it by asserting that 'a woman is a farm':

**Elias Phokane:** I want to say something, but what I know is that women are like a farm. So I don't want to say it. If a woman can lead, then even the soil can also rule.

**Bright Mashego:** So it's complicated.



**Q:** Do you see it that the question of women being able to own land is the same question as women being able to be the chief or leader? Is it the same question for you?

**Elias Phokane:** The woman is a farm.

**Sekubalo Nzukule:** Women should not have equal rights with men.

**Q:** Why?

**Sekubalo Nzukule:** Because women bear children, and I am the, um, the one who is leading the whole process.

[Perhaps a polite translation by Bright. At this point there is much laughter from the men as Phokane and Nzukule continue.]

**Sekubalo Nzukule:** A man should never be under the control of a woman in our culture. No-one will ever see me at home if at all a woman is going to take propriety of equal rights.

[More laughing from the men, and some shouting.]<sup>18</sup>

In the androcentric logic of Nzukule, if the earth is mother then a woman is a farm: both are ploughed and the seed is planted in both. And, as if Nzukule needed to say it, it is the man who is 'leading the process.' The roles of women and of the soil are viewed as passive, and the role of the man as active. Moreover, this point is encoded in the grammar of marriage in Southern African languages: in Sesotho, for example, it is said that a man marries (*nyala*: active voice) a woman, but a woman is married by (*nyalooa*: passive voice) a man. In short, it is the man who is on top. It is upon this basis that Nzukule declares that 'women should not have equal rights with men.' In an attempted *reductio ad absurdum*, Phokane declares that if a woman can lead, 'then even the soil can also rule.' It is worth thinking about. While the *reductio* worked well with the men of Dingleydale, one wonders what the RWM would make of the proposition. Pitted against the record of male leadership, how do women and the soil measure up? Whose criteria, whose rationality, and in what sense 'lead' and 'rule', we might ask. Phokane's discourse threatens the community of men, women and land, and signals a rupture in the essential relationality of people (past, current and future generations, male and female), land and God. Further, one wonders what Phokane and Nzukule would make of the observation that, with respect to the soil, it is the woman as farmer and not the man who plants the seed.

Later in the interview Phokane returned to the theme of fertility and sex, introducing his antipathy to condoms (unprompted) in an otherwise necessary and graphic argument against the killing of his people by whites. Furious, he demanded to know who these killers were, what God they were praying to, if what they were praying about in their churches concerned killing other people, if they ate the people they killed, and if so where they held their feasts! 'They kill God's children without any guilt,' he concludes. It is at this point, following such an outraged interrogation, that Phokane declares, 'They are like condoms!':

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7.

**Elias Phokane:** I am asking that churches should assist in praying that those killers, those who are killing other people, should stop. And those people who are now chasing people and killing them - to whom are they praying? To which God are they praying!? Do they go to church? If they go to church are they praying to kill other people? Do those people eat the people they kill after killing them? Because if I slaughter a cow I use it for meat. I want to know whether they are doing the same, are they eating those people? And where are those people sharing, where they keep these people? They kill God's children without any guilt! They are like a condom, they are not right. *Ba tsheela motho* ('They deprive a person [of existence]').

**Q:** They are like a ... ?

**Bright Mashego:** Like a condom.

**Q:** A condom?

**Bright Mashego:** Like a condom.

**Elias Phokane:** They are like a condom, they are not good. *Ba tsheela motho*.

**Q:** They are not good because .. ?

**Elias Phokane:** *E ea tsheela motho* ('It deprives a person [of existence]').

**Willis Ngobe:** You put the sperm inside that plastic instead of putting it in the womb like a human being.

**Lion Chiloane:** He says its like putting a seed in the ground. So it's not good to throw the sperm away. You must make use of the sperm - it must be alive! [laughs]

**Q:** So they are like a condom, they stop life.

**Elias Phokane:** Yes. Where are you going to get members of the church if you take the sperm, put it in a condom, and throw it away! Now people who are supposed to be churchgoers - where are they going to come from? The police, the soldiers, where will they come from?

**Q:** I see you are against condoms!

[Laughter at this.]

**Elias Phokane:** I have pain on this point because I know that human beings come from God and belong to God. And God knows how he will take these people back to him. With his love! With his will. Not yours. This is where my complaint lies.<sup>19</sup>

For Ngobe it is inhuman for a man to put his sperm inside 'that plastic' instead of inside a woman's womb. As the seed must be planted in the soil, so a man's sperm must be planted inside a woman. Phokane, in support, has both a practical argument with which he taunts us ('where will all your church members come from?'), and a theological argument, based on the creation of human beings by God, to whom they therefore belong and to whom they will return. Putting a fine point on it, Phokane states that people will return to God by *his* love and will, and *not* by that of white researchers. In the end it is a religio-cultural argument directed by Phokane against condoms as symbols of the killing of his people by whites: an inhuman picture of white killers is symbolised by the (white) practice of putting sperm into plastic and throwing it away, instead of putting it inside a woman 'like a human being,' in accordance with the will of God.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, pp.12-13.

Where, in such a culturally charged exchange, is there a point of entry for a woman to argue that she has the right to choose whom she will love and when she will conceive? The reproductive rights of women, symbolised here by the condom, are construed as yet another strategy of whites to deprive black people of their existence. Where is there room in Mr Phokane's consciousness for a woman to argue that while children do come from and belong to God, this does not mean that men have exclusive control over the over interpretive keys to this grace and over the inter-personal physicality of the agency of this grace? Grace must be experienced as such by both the man and the woman; there must be mutuality in the expression of such a relational grace - a mutuality nowhere to be found in the metaphor of ploughing a furrow. In a patriarchal world the 'grace' of conception is all too often experienced by women as a grind, a physical and psychological violence.

Following this exchange I shifted ground to the assertion of land rights by rural women based on their working of the soil as farmers. Ngobe, while agreeing that women are farmers, made no concession to the demand for equality between men and women. The question of women and land was also and immediately the question of equality of rights between men and women in all spheres, particularly that of leadership. In a speech that eventually provoked a sharp reply from the women, Ngobe asserted that black women, unlike white women, did not have the necessary education to lead:

**Q:** It was said at the CLC that the typical farmer in the rural areas is a woman with a baby on her back. It is women who work the land, and so they should have rights to the land. That is the point they were making.

**Willis Ngobe:** Yes, we understand this point. We accept that women are in the majority in the rural areas and play the leading role in farming. They are the typical farmers in the rural areas. We know that. But the only thing is that we differ with them when it comes to equality, equal rights with men.

**Bright Mashego:** This is where they don't really understand and accept.

**Willis Ngobe:** Let me contrast our situation with that of whites. In white society the majority of women are educated. And a person who is educated is able to classify and identify and advise. Because she's able to classify (evaluate) her weaknesses and strengths as regards to humanity in the family. But in black society the problem is that the majority of our people are not educated. They don't know their rights - where they were supposed to control and where they were not supposed to control. To know where the power is. They don't know how to control things. So you will think that maybe we are undermining their equality, but our experience is that we have realised these weaknesses. They are there! They will exist! They will never be done away with in a certain time! And that is a danger therefore! It is a matter of who is in a position to lead and advise and control.<sup>20</sup>

Ngobe appears to be blissfully unaware of the irony inherent in using the same argument against the equality of women that whites used against the equality of blacks: they

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<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, pp.7-8.

are uneducated, they 'know where power is' but cannot be trusted to know 'how to control things.' While Ngobe is specific about the white side of the equation (it is white *women* he is talking about), he is less specific about the black side: he refers generally to 'the majority of our people,' which on the face of it includes men and women. That 'bantu education' (called 'gutter education' in the townships) was a tool of oppression and has left a legacy of illiteracy, exploitation and a generation of youth estranged from and suspicious of 'education' is one of the most debilitating facts of life in South Africa; that this should be used by a black man to reject the claims to equal rights by black women is, however, a specious and oppressive nonsense. Further, Ngobe fails to acknowledge that he is in a position to maintain the status quo with respect to the uneducated status of black women in his village - a point made with precision by Mamse Malapane thereafter.<sup>21</sup> When finally a path was cleared for the women present to speak, they do so in short sharp bursts. The men, oblivious to their complicity in the power of the women's speeches, provide in their behaviour a running confirmation of the validity of their arguments:

**Q:** Can we bring the women into the discussion?

[Bright reinforces the call to the women to participate. They are hesitant to do so - not surprisingly, given the speeches made by the men. I say that in the new South Africa everyone has the right to speak, to vote, to be heard. Even with this, there is still discussion with some of the men before the first woman's voice is heard. Some of the men were agreeing once the matter of the right to vote was brought in, feeling this to be important for themselves. Yet others talked on about the matter of hearing from the women, pro and con. That I am white played a role - representing for some a different culture whose values in the matter of women's rights should not have influence in black culture. At length, Mme Malapane spoke up and was heard.]

**Mamse Malapane:** According to my understanding of the issue of women having equal rights to lead and to rule - it is true! I am in agreement with it! Because men are oppressing us in many ways on many occasions. For example, take education. Because sometimes you will say you require to further your studies, and you will make that request. And they will refuse us, saying, 'Women do not have education. They are not supposed to be educated.'

[All through Mme Malapane's speech two of the men, sitting at the front, leaders, are whispering back and forth between each other.]

**Mamse Malapane:** Because sometimes in the meetings we are afraid to participate. To speak. Sometimes if we raise our points in the meeting they will reject us saying, 'You are a woman, what do you know!'

[Some of the men chuckle at this - though quietly]

**Mamse Malapane:** I agree that women have the right to own land in their own name,

<sup>21</sup> As for the obvious disparities between black and white women, and their inter-action in the struggle against patriarchy in the new South Africa, see the discussion below under the heading, 'Feminist and Womanist Hermeneutics in the new South Africa.'



whether married or not married, and to control that land.

[There is further discussion between Bright and some of the men. There are serious tensions.]

**Eina Mokwena:** I support the statement. The issue. It is true that we women should also own the land. Because if you own a land you can work it on your own and benefit from it yourself. Have something for yourself. Because if you are married to a man, and the land is owned by a man - so you don't benefit anything out of it. And even if he divorces you, you just live as a poor lady, a poor someone, and you have to go away to another place.

**Q:** Thank you Mme for your words.

[A woman who has arrived late wishes to speak. Some of the men ridicule her, saying she arrived late, how can she know what we are talking about? Bright puts her in the picture.]

**N.C. (P.):** I support what the other women have said. But I was not here from the beginning. But I can say there is nothing wrong with a woman owning a piece of land.

[The men, meanwhile, have presumed to enter into a debate concerning her name. Bright is told that her surname is C., and also P., and instructed that the name P. should be placed in brackets. One of the men says it is because of '*dillo tsa lenyalo*,' the sorrows of marriage, and then laughs. Bright and I decide it is time to move on to the next question.]<sup>22</sup>

Mamse Malapane deconstructs Ngobe's lack-of-education argument by exposing the repressive role of men with respect to women's education. Articulating in a few short words the vice-grip that patriarchy maintains on the formal development of women's intelligence, Mamse relates (parodies?) the position of the fathers as, 'Women do not have education. They are not supposed to be educated.' It is an ethic: women are not *supposed* to be educated. She then relates this to the issue of voice-denial in meetings: the reason women are refused a hearing is that 'they know nothing.' Indeed, they are expected to know nothing: they are women - nothing further need be said. Mamse, playing off of the speech of Ngobe and the efforts of the men to pre-empt and subvert her voice, demonstrates the validity of her statement that 'men have oppressed women in many ways on many occasions,' as she drives on to her conclusion that 'women have the right to own land, whether married or not, and to control that land.' Eina Mokwena focuses more exclusively on the issue of a woman's right to own land, raising the argument of economic necessity in a context of male domination, divorce and abandonment. A woman's demand for an independent right to own land is hereby related to her right to life. Vulnerable to the power men exercise in a patriarchal society, a woman may be left 'as a poor someone' and 'have to go away to another place' - a dispossession and removal from home no less devastating than the forced removals perpetrated by the apartheid

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp.8-10.

regime, comprising a social biography of serial dispossession and relocation beyond that of black men in its pain and alienation. Such a personal history is a basic fact of life for many women, to be viewed in the indicative and not the subjunctive, as illustrated immediately by the response of the men to the speech of N.C.(P.). Her desire to address the meeting is greeted with derision not only because she arrived late but because of her status as a divorced woman. Her surname is held up to scrutiny and ridicule. Her suffering, named explicitly by one of the men as 'the sorrows of marriage,' is laughed at. That he cites the sorrows of *marriage* and not divorce is itself a telling remark. Eina is shown no respect; her presence and her voice are, for the men, expendable. Truly, *mma ngwana o tshwara thipa ka bogale* - the mother of the child holds the knife on the sharp side! And she has something to say about it.

### 7.3.6 Male Responses from the Barolong

The responses of the Barolong men who attended the theological hearing on land restitution in Ikageng, Potchefstroom display a difference of opinion between those who struggle to understand and support women's demands for equality and the right to own land, and those who sense therein an ominous threat to society. The speeches of Mr J Mathibe and Mr P. Mocoenyane are introduced as representative. Mr. Mathibe begins with an unprompted reference to the motto of the RWM, and argues for an end to 'apartheid in the job or in leadership situations between men and women':

**Mr J Mathibe:** In brief, let me say that 'the mother of the child holds the knife on the sharp end.' A woman holds the angry end of the knife. I think that if we can free women to advance - because they are the people who are responsible to hold the family together, and who are responsible for everything in the house (washing, cooking, caring for children) - I think things will go smoothly. If women can be freed from the restrictions placed upon them at present things will go smoothly. I think it is about time that all restrictions are done away with. There should not be apartheid in the job or in leadership situations between men and women. That women should not be restricted and told they are minors, not having the right to speak, not having the right to stand before men, to speak to men, nor even the right to pray. Me, I see it to be right that we must be equal. Because when I am ill at home it will be possible for me to instruct my wife to go to the meeting and chair the meeting. Because I'll send her to take over. So the women should have the right to attend the meeting and inform the meeting that I am going to take my husband's place at this meeting because he is sick at home. Therefore I agree women must be part and parcel of all activities, offices and functions in the new South Africa.

So that we can maybe gauge that apartheid and jealousy will not come to an end until women are free. She must not be kept back because of the jealousy of men. And maybe it can be stopped - the repression of women will come to an end in the new South Africa. There will be new developments and progress in the lives of all South Africans.

While Mathibe casts men in the role of the liberators of women ('if we can free women to advance') and continues to locate a women's role in the home ('washing, cooking, caring for

children') save for those occasions when she might be sent by her husband to represent him, he also speaks of the workplace and of leadership roles. He calls for an end to all restrictions on women, including those on their voice, even in prayer, and sees it 'to be right' that 'we must be equal.' Significantly, he calls the inequality of men and women an 'apartheid' and links this with male jealousy - the only man to do so explicitly. 'She must not be kept back because of the jealousy of men,' he declares, and sees in women's liberation 'new developments and progress in the lives of *all* South Africans.' Mr Mocoenyane, however, is not so easily impressed, saying that talk is easy:

**Mr P. Mocoenyane:** Greetings. It is easier to talk than to deliver the goods. I recall the prodigal son who was asking for his share from his father. After a time he squandered it all, to the point where he had to eat with the pigs. If women are allowed to hold office, or play any role, it is for them to be careful and not just make a mess of ('*ho senya ho senya*'; literally, 'to destroy to destroy') these positions and opportunities like the prodigal son. Now the women want to be given opportunities equal to the men - to play a role in all decision-making. But I'm afraid they can destroy all their opportunities to play such a role. And the minute they ruin that opportunity, and mess up that right, they will regret it. They'll have no food to eat, no place to stay.<sup>23</sup>

Mocoenyane's position, to paraphrase it, is: Equality? Let them try it. But don't come crying if it all goes wrong. His language is ominous: 'They will have no food to eat, no place to stay.' He seems to view women's rights as a probationary thing, to be considered at most on a trial basis, in the full expectation that they will fall flat on their faces, or, given enough rope, will hang themselves. Concerning his interpretation of the prodigal son narrative, the irony is that the prodigal could *only* have been a *son*, because the story involves the squandering of an inheritance, and daughters could not (with few exceptions) inherit. It could not have been a story about a prodigal daughter. Thus the story, while seeming to offer Mr Mocoenyane an opportunity to fortify his word of warning with a biblical text, works against him when its social context is remembered. Further, given that the issue of 'messaging up a right' is raised, the question may be asked: how have men exercised their rights? Have they not 'messed up' their rights? Where, we may ask Mr Mocoenyane, would any of us be if our rights depended upon us exercising them perfectly. The lesson to be learned from the story of the prodigal son is that of return and forgiveness, not that of failure and 'I told you so.' On this analysis the parable would seem to be more aptly directed to the attention of the men - both younger and older brothers.

<sup>23</sup> Theological Hearing on Land Restitution with the Barolong Action Committee, Ikageng, Potchefstroom, unpublished, 13 March, 1994, pp.20-21.

### 7.3.7 Dialogue in the Greenvalley Farmers' Union

It was the Greenvalley Farmers' Union, meeting near Acornhoek not thirty minutes from Dingleydale, that provided the most practical and promising approach to the question of women and land rights in rural communities. A woman's right to own land was accepted as her basic right as a human being 'who needs to live,' and as a basic necessity for the care of children - whether or not she is married. On the basis of this consensus, the discussion turned to the details concerning the ways in which, in the case of a married woman, a husband and wife could share land and its proceeds, drawing on the traditions of the parents, the decisions reached at the CLC, and the practical solidarity of a union:

**Voice 4 (f):** A woman has got the right to own land because she is a human being who needs to live! To have something to eat. Whether she is married or not!

**Voice 5 (f):** It is a necessity. It is a right. Even if not married. You may give birth to children being unmarried, and you must feed them!

**Voice 6 (f):** I agree with the CLC decisions.

**Voice 7 (m):** It is right. We agree. The women are right.

**Voice 8 (m):** I differ slightly. With respect to married couples: I do not believe they should separate easily, if the wife wants land. The husband and wife should talk about it. There should be negotiations when a woman wants a plot.

**Barnas Mashego:** Has she got the right, in your view?

**Voice 8 (m):** Yes, she has the right.

**Barnas Mashego:** The CLC Land Charter says she has it whether married or not. And, when married, we must look at how: in or out of community of property: that is, the stand, or the fields, the soil, and so on.

**Voice 9 (m):** If a plot has been given then both men and women should share that plot. That is when married. Share it in both names. But unmarried women and widows have the right to own a plot by themselves.

**Voice 10 (m):** Women have the right to land. When a married woman has her own plot, okay - but the produce of both plots should be shared by both.

**Voice 11 (m: very old):** Long ago it was like this with my mother and father. My mother had her plot, my father had his, and they shared the proceeds with all of us.

[At this point there is a discussion concerning whether or not the proceeds, specifically in the form of money, belong to the woman or to both the woman and her husband.]

**Voice 12 (f):** I support it 100% that a woman should own her own farm, and the husband his. Yet, they bank together the proceeds.<sup>24</sup>

While Greenvalley is only a thirty minute drive from Dingleydale, it seems a century away on the issue of women and land. What emerged was a shared commitment to working out the details of the rights of men and woman to own and work the land at a practical level through conversation, consultation and negotiation in the family and the farmers union. That all voices were respected in the discussion, and that women were accepted as full members of the farmers union as a matter of course provides a much-needed counter to the discourse and

<sup>24</sup> Group Interview with the Greenvalley Farmers Union, Acornhoek, Bushbuckridge District, unpublished, 1994, pp.4-6.



practice of many of the rural communities in the Bushbuckridge and Mhala districts of the Lowveld.

#### 7.4 Of Motherhood and Umbilical Cords, Belonging and Ubuntu-botho

Reference has already been made to the tradition of imaging the intimate ties that bind people and land as an umbilical relationship, wherein the land is mother and we are sons and daughters of the soil.<sup>25</sup> We do well to recall the statement of Joe Seremane, the Chief Land Claims Commissioner, in which he links the assertion of a birthright with the images of mother, child and umbilical cord: 'Every child in this land has a birthright. The umbilical cord between children and mother earth tells them where they belong' (in DLA 1995e). Quoted more fully in a book edited for the LAPC, Seremane, remarkably for a man, moves from the umbilical cord to the womb, 'Like the womb, earth is the source of life. And when we die, we return to the earth. That is why the land is important' (Winburg and Weinburg 1996). *The sense of birth and belonging links questions of right and relationality with respect to land restitution, and foregrounds the importance of women's hermeneutics for a grounded approach to theological ethics in general.* Seeking to explore these linkages further, I asked Archbishop Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng to comment on a statement made by a participant in a PLOEG Workshop on land restitution in Namaqualand: 'We do not inherit our land from the ancestors,' said one man, 'we borrow it from our children' (PLOEG 1994). In so saying, the man shifted the perspective from the past to the future, from a sense of ancestral right to a sense of progenitorial responsibility and trust. In response, Ngada and Mofokeng speak of the umbilical cord and of *ubuntu*:

**N.H. Ngada:** Again there - I should think that the borrowing of land from the children goes along again with another custom. When a child is born the cord, the umbilical cord, is cut, and then part of it is left there, at the place of birth. And when the child grows this thing, this umbilical cord here, the part that dries up, is not just thrown into the fire (laughs).

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** No.

**N.H. Ngada:** It is buried, let me put it that way -

**Q:** In the ground?

**N.H. Ngada:** Especially in the house. Not in the ground maybe. Somewhere in the house.

**Q:** Okay.

**N.H. Ngada:** It's buried somewhere in the house. That thing, as far as the land business is concerned, says a lot. It says you belong here.

**Q:** Right here.

**N.H. Ngada:** But if you are taken away from this part of yours, this umbilical cord, definitely something happens to you. You are losing, you have lost part of yourself.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** You know, a Mosotho person will tell you that, '*Khubu ea ka e setse*

<sup>25</sup> See the discussion in chapter one under the heading, 'Hermeneutics as a Terrain of Struggle: Land and Contested Conceptualisations and Spiritualities.'

*Matsieng*. 'My umbilical cord remains in Matsieng [the royal village]. My origin, where I belong, is still in Lesotho, not in this place where I am now. In other words, I'm just here (for example in Johannesburg) for certain purposes, otherwise I belong somewhere else.' And this is why many Basotho are taken home to Lesotho for burial when they pass away.

**N.H. Ngada:** My real being.

**Q:** My real self.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** The belonging part of it is very important.

**Q:** What you say with respect to the umbilical cord, in response to the statement about borrowing the land from the children, reminds me of the Christian Council of Namibia. At the time of Independence in Namibia they wrote a report on the land issue. And they said people have an umbilical relationship with the land, and that their traditional ties with the land must be respected.

**N.H. Ngada:** Exactly! That's it!

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Yes.

**Q:** I had taken it to be symbolic, but now you are telling me also that it is a very physical and personal thing.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Yes, it is.

**Q:** Now, does that mean the land is like the mother?

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** It is!

**Q:** If I am attached umbilically to the land, is the land like my mother?

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Yes it is.

**Q:** Can you talk further about this?

**N.H. Ngada:** This is why we treat the land with great sensitivity. We are very sensitive in treating the land. Most black people, I mean not these modern people, most black people know that. You cannot just go and plough anywhere, for example. You cannot just go and make graves, a graveyard anywhere. And if you go there, to dig a grave - it's not just anybody who goes there and points the place where graves are supposed to be dug. Even though we know now we have to save space because we have been cramped into that 13% of the land, but even so we know that you can't bury an elderly person next to a child. And there, someone elderly should go from the family - he is the one who is supposed to dig first. It's not everybody who can just come and say, 'Okay, we'll dig here,' and then we dig. Somebody from the family must come and put his first pick, first.

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** A good example is how burials are treated by these young people these days. That is when you ask yourself: what is really happening?! Because the burial of a human being is supposed to be highly respected. But now because of these kids who are born somewhere, and leave their umbilical cords somewhere in hospitals or anywhere, look at what's happening! They don't know what the land means! So they are just crazy. They take funerals as one of those feasting days. A lot of this European liquor. A lot of shootings. They even shoot the body of a friend who is dead in that coffin. Because there is nothing important to them.

**N.H. Ngada:** They have lost *ubuntu*. Human-ness.

**Q:** Can a person lose *ubuntu*!?

**N.H. Ngada:** Definitely.

**Q:** Can you regain it -

**N.H. Ngada:** You can lose *ubuntu*, especially if you have got no connections with your ancestors. You lose your *ubuntu* very easily. And you become a kind of a - I don't know - a creature now. A kind of a wild creature! Because nothing touches you. Nothing whatsoever. You have got no - what can I say now?

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** No conscience at all.

**N.H. Ngada:** You've got no conscience. Your conscience, your conscience is dead.

**Q:** So, the forced removals, which pushed people into these 'homelands', and small townships, contributed to this loss of *ubuntu*.

**N.H. Ngada:** 100 percent!

**Kenosi Mofokeng:** Quite a lot! Whooh!

**N.H. Ngada:** ... So that, as you say, the forced removals have done a great deal of harm to

the ... chain of traditional lifestyle. It has broken all those good things. Those good connections. And some people in town, some of our children, have lost the - (pauses) - the trend of being human.

To travel in two or three minutes of conversation from the description of an umbilical experience of belonging to the place of one's birth to the description of so severe an estrangement from the place of one's birth that *ubuntu* itself is lost was indeed shocking. While the land will always be mother, some of her children are said to have 'lost the trend of being human.' The forced removals of people from ancestral land are seen as having played a decisive role in this estrangement, breaking 'all of those good connections' signified in the word *ubuntu*. 'If you are taken away from your umbilical cord,' says Ngada, 'something happens to you ... you have lost part of yourself.' Where an umbilical relation to the soil signals a 'sensitive' treatment of the earth as mother, even of 'womb', the estrangement of children from that mother leaves them desensitised, 'a kind of wild creature,' whom 'nothing touches ... nothing whatsoever' because '(their) conscience is dead.' The desensitisation is religio-cultural and spiritual, resulting from the estrangement of the sons and daughters of the soil from mother earth. For Ngada the implications of this desensitisation verges on the ontological: in such a state it is possible to 'lose your *ubuntu* very easily.' Grim images come to mind: the city as wasteland (Robbins 1987, writing about Johannesburg), and the inner city as site of concrete nihilism (C. West 1993, writing about the cities of the United States). Part of the way back home lies through the fraught territory of the reconciliation of male and female with respect to both the land and humanity. Where there is no sense of belonging all are lost. *A woman's hermeneutics of land restitution tells us that the primary restitution and reconciliation is one of spirit between and among men, women and the soil from which we come and to which we all return.* As Kenosi (under)states, 'The belonging part of it is very important.'

### **7.5 Rural Women and Biblical Hermeneutics**

While the question of rural women's biblical hermeneutics requires extensive further research, allowing for a close reading of texts in community, and exploring for example the importance of relationality in their interpretations, the approach of rural women to biblical texts may be broadly indicated. The responses of women in the TLRC communities to the text of Numbers 27:1-11 (the daughters of Zelophehad), for example, and to other texts long established as supportive of women's struggles (e.g. Galatians 3:28, for years the motto of the

women's desk of the SACC) were indeed along relational and narrative lines, wherein the *memoria passionis* of rural black women and of their biblical sisters were engaged across the text/interpreter distancing with a surprising immediacy. For example, when the text of Numbers 27:1-11 was read in Komaggas, Namaqualand, Aunt Lucy Fontein simply said, 'There you are!'<sup>26</sup>

In Driefontein, when presented with the story of Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah, the daughters of Zelophehad, the women saw biblical support for their own struggles for land in spite of the obviously patriarchal context in which the case is recorded. It is because there is no son that the daughters may receive their father's allocation, and they must marry within their own clan (36:1-13) so that the land itself may remain an inheritance among their father's people. Far from rejecting the story of Mahlah and her sisters because of its patriarchal context, however, there were congratulations offered by the women on the choice of text:

**Joyce Ngema:** Let me congratulate Moruti Thabo for the text of scripture he has given to us here. This is what we have been longing for. That we get the rights. This will now give us strength, that the bible supports us, that we are actually entitled and obliged to ask for our rights. On our own side, we used to see that things were not going well. We were just fighting and having no support and all that. Because actually the fathers will come and stay in the house with me, and after that they will take the things and go with them to their houses. Knowing that I am a defenceless woman. Knowing that there is no-one who will stand for me. No son and no husband. And another point is that girls are getting married and they don't get equal rights. They lose their rights.

[There is clapping as Joyce ends her speech.]

**Q:** Thank you very much Joyce.

**Pinki Letsoane:** I would like to congratulate Moruti Thabo who has just given us this text from the Bible. Because if we women say we want rights, it is not something we are inventing and enforcing. It is something which actually originated from the scriptures. From the bible.<sup>27</sup>

The sense of excitement at breaking through male discursive power with respect to the biblical text, and of being able to enlist this text, seen to be a window of liberation in a wall of patriarchal tradition, was written all over the faces of the Driefontein women. The bible was

<sup>26</sup> Quoted from the Group Interview on Women and Land, Komaggas, Namaqualand, 1 September 1994, unpublished. Taking part in the group interview were Terry Matthews-Grove (who translated between Afrikaans and English), Aunt Lucy Fontein, Maria Losper and Annie Joseph. It should be noted that Aunt Lucy, born in 1921, had much more to say on the subject than her memorable one-liner.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 11-12. Steven Maseko, largely in support of the women, found the text to be 'uplifting', and called for widows to 'get what the man would get,' and to be supported by the state as part of their entitlement: 'According to the text which you have just stated to us, to me it is an uplifting text - especially to the mothers, the women. Especially on that point that when he died before reaching the land, having no son to receive the inheritance, the heritage. It comes back to the point which states that if I am a husband having a wife - if I die, then the man who is to enter the house will take all the property, will take all the inheritance. We therefore stand on that point too: that if in case a wife has lost her husband, has become a widow, she is entitled to get a



interpreted as not only supporting the struggles of women for equality but as *obliging* them, as in the case of a divine mission, to struggle for their rights. The same held true in Village Main, Johannesburg, where several members of the Mothers' Union (*Bo 'Ma Bana*) interpreted the text as freeing women to receive the inheritance of their fathers. When the only male elder present, Wilson Ntsala, pointed out that God had agreed with the women's request only because there was no son, the women conceded the point, but then introduced a reading of Galatians 3:28, arguing that in Christ there is no inequality between black and white, rich and poor, male and female. Further, they argued that the inheritance of the fathers is shown to be available for all (3:29) on the basis of this equality in Christ.<sup>28</sup> When Mr Ntsala then sought to drive a wedge between the Hebrew and New testaments, asking the women to choose which of the two should come first, Mme Fosa replied that, while the Hebrew Testament (*Testamente ea Khale*) was the foundation (*motheo*) concerning creation and the question of who God is, it was the New Testament that taught equality: 'Jesus taught equality. God does not like to see any oppression: black or white, rich or poor, male or female.' Mme Hlalele added, 'The New Testament is the foundation of faith (*motheo oa tumelo*). Jesus taught us the way we should go.' When Evodia Motsibidi declared that men were still trying to keep women back, including the repression of their voice (*bo 'Me, ha ba na lentsoe*; the mothers do not have a say), other women agreed, but found support in the courage shown by women in the biblical text:

**Mrs. Fosa:** Men are still pressurising us. *Ba re hatella*. They are trampling over us, oppressing us. But in Jesus' time it was the women who supported him. And at the cross! *Bo 'Ntate ba balehile!* The fathers ran away! *Ke basadi feela!* It was only women (who stayed at the cross)! And today in Village Main it is us women only! The men are all gone!!!

[Except for Ntsala, who is laughing.]

**Q:** Do women therefore know more of the pain of the cross than men?

**Several Women:** Yes! *Haholo!* Hugely so! *Bophelong, bo 'Me ba tsebile bohloko ho feta bo 'Ntate!* In life the mothers know pain much more than do the fathers! *Haholo!* Too much!

**Mrs. Fosa:** The men know nothing!

**Q:** And of the sons and daughters?

**Several Women:** This is a very difficult issue for us Basotho. We want equality now! *Ditokelo di lekane, ho ngoana oa mora le oa moroadi*. Equal rights for the child who is a son and for the child who is a daughter. Our reason is: they are all our children. We brought them up. They are equal in us.<sup>29</sup>

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support. And she must get what the man was supposed to get. Even the government must support her to see that she will get all she needs.'

<sup>28</sup> The traditional language of the King James Version captures their point most clearly, 'And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.'

<sup>29</sup> Quoted from 'The Bible and Land: Bible Studies with the Bo 'Ma Bana (Mothers' Union) of Village Main Parish, Johannesburg, January - December 1994,' unpublished, pp.6-9. Taking part in the bible studies, which considered the texts of Psalm 24, Leviticus 25, Numbers 27 and 36, and Galatians 3:26-28, were Nora Malebese (secretary), Amelia Thejane, Julia Mokete, Mme Hlalele, Mme Mantsoe, Mme Lefosa, Evodia Motsibidi, Angelina Seema, Mme Fosa, Irene Kadi, Mr Wilson Ntsala, and the Minister, Moruti Thabo.

The Mothers' Union of Village Main, Johannesburg, comprised of women whose work (almost exclusively that of under-paid domestic workers) takes them away from their families for weeks on end, viewed Mahlah and her sisters as stars of faith (*dinaledi tsa tumelo*) whose courage enabled them to succeed in breaking through the systemic patriarchy of their people. The relational hermeneutical pathways of shared suffering and struggle were employed to make an empowering contact with the daughters of Zelofkade which, when coupled with the text of Galatians 3 and the subversive memory of the women at the cross of Christ, emboldened the members of the Mothers' Union in their articulation of a theological ethic of the equality of men and women.

In the ongoing and crucial debate in feminist biblical hermeneutics concerning how a patriarchal textual tradition can be employed by women in the struggle for liberation, it appears that rural women are, in their affirmation, employing a hermeneutic that operates more 'in front of the text' (West 1991; Schneiders 1989) than 'behind the text' (West 1991; Sakenfeld 1989). While Sakenfeld exposes, necessarily, the patriarchal interests which lie behind the text of Numbers 27:1-11 and 36:1-13, her hermeneutic of suspicion circumscribes too rigidly the liberative possibilities which the text offers to women (Sakenfeld 1989:157-166). Schneiders, on the other hand, following Gadamer and Ricoeur, sees the text not as a static container of fixed semantic meanings, but as a dynamic medium, 'a mediation of meaning which takes place as an event in the reader' (Schneiders 1989:5). The text may thus have a plurality of meanings, some of which may 'explode' the very world out of which the text has emerged. It is thus possible, she argues, for a biblical text 'to subvert the patriarchal world which produced it and whose biases it expresses and promotes' (Schneiders 1989: 7). Concomitantly, such an approach to the biblical text allows that a text may 'create a world which it projects ahead of itself':

This projected world, this possible reality, which Ricoeur calls the world of the text, is not limited by the actual reality of the writer's historical world even though it is in some sense derived therefrom. The text projects reality, not under the modality of what is, but under the modality of what can be. What the reader does by interpreting the text is to discern that projected world, and to respond to the invitation to inhabit it, to be according to its structures and dynamics (1989: 7).

The subjunctivity of Schneiders' 'modality of what can be' resonates well with the approach of rural women to biblical texts in a context of transition, and yet cries out for a transformation of 'what is' in the indicative. Schneiders' answer to the question concerning whether and how an oppressive text can function in a liberative way for women may be seen to

offer distinct possibilities for a women's biblical hermeneutics of liberation and transformation (West 1991: 85). While the world from which the text emerged was indeed a patriarchal one, and while the text betrays an oppressive androcentricity, the world which the text projects in front of itself is for Schneiders 'the world of Christian discipleship' which is 'structured by the paschal mystery of Jesus, in which life issues from death, and by the eschatological hope of liberation for all in the boundless shalom of the reign of God' (Schneiders 1989:8). While admittedly utopian, such an approach to biblical interpretation defines for Schneiders a 'hermeneutics of transformation,' both of the biblical text and of its interpreters. In a statement with great relevance for black rural hermeneutics, Schneiders argues for a mutual liberation of text and interpreter on the way to a praxis that has the power to transform both consciousness and structures:

We must not propose the oppressive patriarchalism in the biblical text as the Word of God. A hermeneutics of transformation is the foundation of a Second Testament spirituality enabling a theological engagement of the text which is neither surrender to nor mastery of the text. It is, rather, an ongoing engagement of the text in the process of liberation, a liberation of ourselves but also of the text from the ideology of patriarchy. This is a liberation which must bear fruit in effective action for the restructuring in justice and love of Church and society (Schneiders 1989: 9).

Schneiders' reference to a Christian discipleship 'structured by the paschal mystery of Jesus' and by 'the eschatological hope of liberation' recalls the biblical hermeneutics of the Moletele in the preceding chapter, and reminds us that the *memoria passionis et mortis Jesu Christi* is engaged in the context of the *memoria resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. The *memoria resurrectionis* is itself engaged by a consciousness shaped by the transformative eschatology of the in-breaking reign of God on earth, issuing in a liberative and transformative Christian praxis of action in hope (Bosch 1990; 1991). It recalls also the argument of Russell Botman for a praxis of 'transformation as discipleship' (Botman 1994), and provides a promising direction for future work with respect to rural women's biblical hermeneutics.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> In her work on black feminist hermeneutics Joyce Masenya, drawing on the work of Reuther, Sakenfeld, Schneiders, Schüssler Fiorenza, Stanton, Tribble and G. West, identifies three strategies, following Sakenfeld, employed by feminist theologians seeking to develop a liberative and transformative biblical hermeneutics. Rather than choosing which is most helpful for a black feminist hermeneutics, Masenya explores the merits of all three. Of the first, looking to texts *about* women to counteract well-known texts *against* women, Masenya says, 'In this regard, the foregrounding of Jesus' or God's encounters with *despised* women (Mary the poor woman [class], the Samaritan woman [race], God's visitation to Hagar [race]) could be appealing to black women.' Of the second, looking to the bible generally for a theological perspective offering a critique of patriarchy, she focuses on Jesus as liberator and redeemer, arguing that the prophetic-liberating tradition focused on Christ has power for black women who are in a personal relationship 'with a loving saviour' who identified with the poor and the oppressed, the widow and the outcast. Of the third, looking to texts about women to learn more from the history and stories of ancient and modern women living in patriarchal cultures, she says, 'The main strength of this approach is that women (including Black women) may appropriate the Biblical tradition by identifying with the women in the Bible in their oppression as well as in their exercise of freedom.' This said,

### 7.6 Feminist and Womanist Hermeneutics in South Africa

The critical, relational and holistic approach of published feminist and womanist hermeneutics in South Africa resonates strongly with the grounded *hermeneutics* of rural women concerning land and life. All five of the 'most important principles' in feminist theology identified by Wilma Jakobsen in 'Ethics in Feminist Theology,' for example, may be seen as playing a role in local hermeneutics concerning land restitution: the starting point is always women's experience; patriarchal history and theology are rejected; the analysis of scripture and tradition is done from a woman's perspective; the dualisms (body/mind; feelings/reason) which are part of western male thought-systems are rejected; and relationality is emphasised as central to all that feminist theology attempts to do (Jakobsen 1994: 148). Of specific significance for a grounded hermeneutics are the following points: the grounding of feminist ethics in women's experience, moving 'inductively from experience to definitions and conclusions'; the integration of body and mind, feelings and reason, which 'welcomes feeling for what it is: the basic ingredient in our relational transaction with the world'; and the integration of the personal and the political ('the personal is the political'), wherein women tell their stories and name their experiences with one another, discovering in the process 'a commonality of experiences born out of social structures which perpetuate female subordination.' Jakobsen sees narrative as a moral activity in feminist and womanist hermeneutics, arguing that 'the process of story-telling ... affirms the human worth and dignity of women in a world that does not do so' (Jakobsen 1994: 151). Drawing on the work of Beverly Harrison, both Jakobsen and Denise Ackermann (1991) affirm that in feminist hermeneutics 'relationality is at the heart of all things ... nothing living is self-contained' (Harrison 1985:15-16). With respect to relationality in decision-making, a fraught issue in the politics of gender at the local level in the TLRC communities, Jakobsen asserts that ethical decisions cannot be made by individuals or unrepresentative groups of individuals in isolation from the community as a whole, and affirms an 'ethic of relationality' in place of an exclusively male ownership of decision-making bodies and processes in the community.

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Masanya notes that the use of one or more of these strategies have led some feminists to 'drift away from the Bible,' because they do not find it a 'suitable tool for the course of their struggle.' In a statement that rings true for women in black rural communities, Masanya then observes, 'This may scarcely be the case in the Black church because the average Black Christian woman primarily focuses on her relationship with Christ as it is reflected in the Bible, and secondly, she accepts the Bible as her norm ... thus, *with appropriate hermeneutics*, one which recognises her as a full partner with men in God's plan for the world, this woman, who is in bondage, can attain complete freedom in Christ' (1994: 42-46, italics mine).



Jakobsen's ethic of relationality includes, perhaps in its first movement, the sisterhood of black and white women engaged in the struggle against patriarchy in South Africa. In her discussion of feminist and womanist hermeneutics in the United States and South Africa, Jakobsen faces up to the reality that 'sisterhood is complicated':

Although feminism and feminist theology have more recently acquired a greater legitimacy within the struggle for democracy in South Africa, the reality is that sisterhood is complicated. Although women are oppressed on the basis of their gender, many more people, not only women, are also oppressed on the basis of race, class, religion and ethnicity. This has given rise to the distinction often made between feminist and womanist theology. The implication is that while the former has to do essentially with fulfilment and meaning, the latter is primarily concerned with survival ... The needs and experiences of first-world women are not necessarily those of third-world women. We must seek that which is uniquely our own in our complex society, and forge a feminist liberation theology and feminist ethic that understand the interstructuring of oppressions in our land (1994: 149).

Jakobsen's 'interstructuring of oppressions' is in close agreement with the analysis of Kelly Brown Douglas in *The Black Christ* (1994) that black women face a 'multidimensional oppression.' In her definition of the term 'womanist' Douglas argues that, while the term has its origins in Alice Walker's interpretation of the black cultural expression, 'You acting womanish,' which Walker took to mean audacious, courageous or wilful behaviour (Walker 1983), the meaning has expanded beyond Walker's words:

It points to the richness and complexity of being Black and female in a society that tends to devalue both Blackness and womanhood. Womanist symbolises Black women's experience of struggle against their multidimensional oppression. In religious and theological scholarship, womanist signals understandings of the Bible, church, God and Jesus Christ, which have emerged from the social-historical contexts of Black women struggling to survive with dignity and to be free' (1994: 128-129).

Douglas, critiquing Black Theology for its androcentricity, asserts that Black women have been concerned not only with women but with the entire community: 'sons and daughters, husband and brothers.' She quotes Alice Walker as describing a womanist as one who is 'committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people,' and follows Walker in tracing this commitment through the life of Harriet Tubman, a slave who, having escaped to the North successfully, returned to the South to rescue her family. Risking her life repeatedly she made numerous trips back and forth between the North and South, leading other slaves to freedom. It is Tubman's biography, says Douglas, that lies behind the following dialogue introduced by Walker as part of her definition of 'womanist': ' "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time" ' (in Douglas 1994: 98).

The analysis that Black Theology, dominated by black men and their interests, has played a role in the suppression of a womanist theology of liberation and transformation has achieved a higher profile in recent years. Following the EATWOT conference in Johannesburg in August 1993, several articles were published in the JBTSA challenging the androcentricity of black theology in South Africa. Zodwa Memela, for example, taking as her point of departure Jacquelyn Grant's question, 'How adequate is the conception of Black Theology for the liberation of the total Black community?' concludes that Black Theology has 'delayed development of a holistic theology of liberation.' The time has come for women to reflect on their experience 'because it is within this context that God's revelation is experienced and received by women.' Putting a fine point on it, Memela asks, 'Are Black Theologians wanting to maintain that it is the prerogative of men to handle theological issues?' (Memela 1994: 19). Taking her own experience as a black woman as her hermeneutical starting point, Memela uses female and feminine images for her pain, her struggle and her hope:

I am writing from an experience of pain, humiliation, of struggling with what my faith means in the context in which I find myself: pain because of what Black women have been subjected to because of the colour of their skin (both by White women and White men); humiliation as a result of an undermining of Black women's integrity and dignity by Black men, as if oppression by whites was not hard enough ... (I am writing) from a context of the cry of weariness from all women on the one hand, and on the other hand from a deep experience of faith in God who brings hope. It is a time when God is giving birth to something new. The delay of the birth is probably caused among other things by (to use medical terms) a mal presentation of the unborn baby. A normal presentation is the vertex (head), now once the baby presents by the shoulder or breech (buttocks), labour is prolonged as both these parts of the body find it difficult to negotiate the pelvis. In cases like these a cut has to be made or a Caesarean section performed to extract the new life without damage to the mother and the child. It is in the realisation of this that Black women say they will cut if necessary, but their freedom will be realised' (1994: 13-14).

That such a 'cut' is needed for the new to be born, given its 'mal presentation,' is a compelling analysis of the current moment in South Africa. If the new *kairos* is transformation (Botman 1994), it must be a *kairos* that all can identify as such and participate in as subjects-in-transformation and subjects of transformation. While to ask the question, '*Kairos*? What *kairos*?' overplays the role of suspicion, there is a sense in which we may only experience the successful birth of the new when the mothers have done their cutting and given birth, correcting the life-threatening obstructionist orientation of the initial presentation of the child in the birth canal. In the light of Memela's birthing images we may ask: in all of the negotiations on the way to a new South Africa, involving seemingly all conceivable interests and perspectives, why have we heard so little about the need to 'negotiate the pelvis?' Joe Seremane's employment of the metaphors of mother and child, umbilical cord and womb, with

respect to people and the earth, and his relation therein of birthright and belonging, is the closest a man has come to valuing such a *hermeneutic* in official discourse concerning land reform.

The need for a holistic relational hermeneutics of transformation is argued powerfully by the feminist theologian Denise Ackermann in 'Being Woman, Being Human,' her contribution to the influential anthology *Women Hold Up Half the Sky*. Ackermann argues *contra* androcentricity and patriarchy for a 'relational anthropology' and a 'transformative view of humanity which wants not only a newly integrated self, but a newly integrated social order' (1991: 100). Relationality is the 'key concept in the attempt to understand what it means to be human from a woman's perspective,' and is for Ackermann related to the injunction of Jesus Christ to his disciples, 'You must love your neighbour as yourself' (Mark 12:31). Acknowledging that some may not wish to own the biblical source of the quotation, Ackermann allows that the words of Jesus may be understood in a relational way as 'the practice of valuing women's humanity ... based on love and justice.' For Ackermann, relationality is thus the opposite of alienation, spiritual deprivation, apathy, sexism, racism and classism. Relationality begins within the self, affirming a love of self which enables love of neighbour as self. God is encountered as 'God-in-relation,' and the experience of such a God is the source of our relationality. With respect to this divine-human relationality, the relationality of Jesus Christ with God and with people is for Ackermann the 'primary paradigm.' At stake in such a relationality is nothing less than the transformation of humanity:

Relationality as basis for a transformative view of humanity is thus concerned with our relationships with ourselves, with one another, with God and with our environment. These concerns are inseparable. Such relationality must demand a change in societal structures, away from male-dominated hierarchies and divisions. Its vision is truly 'egalitarian' as befitting the 'reign' of God (Ackermann, 1991: 102).

An essential dynamic of this relationality is the telling and re-telling of the *memoria passionis* of rural black women, and their anamnestic solidarity with their mothers, grandmothers and ancestors. The work of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1983), drawing on the work of Johann Metz (1980) and Walter Benjamin (1969), on a subversive yet redemptive *memoria passionis* of women and on anamnestic solidarity with the victims of dominant History and oppressive patriarchy, including her assertion that this anamnesis must participate not only in past women's suffering and victimisation but also in their struggle for liberation and victory, has been crucial for feminist and womanist theologians in South Africa



(Ackermann, Draper, Mashinini, eds., 1991).<sup>31</sup> As we have seen, the ongoing relationship of current generations with their ancestors in the TLRC communities through dreams, visions and graveside communication is an inherent and crucial aspect of the spirituality and strategy of struggles for land restitution - involving the resurrection and transformation of community in the breadth and depth of its relationality, inclusive of foremothers and forefathers, granddaughters and grandsons. At a national level, the 'dangerous memories' of Lillian Ngoyi, Victoria Mxenge, Molly Blackburn and Helen Joseph, of the song 'You strike a woman, you have struck a rock!' sung by thousands of women on their way to the Union Buildings in Pretoria on 9 August 1956 to protest against J.G. Strijdom and his law that decreed that women had to carry passbooks, and, let us remember it, of the thousands of Boere women and children who died in British concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer war at the turn of the century, are but a few instances wherein an anamnestic solidarity with the suffering and struggle of the foremothers empowers women today in their struggles for land and equality, and for an inclusive transformative relationality. At the same time theirs is also a forward-looking relationality, conjoining mothers, daughters, sons and the land in an intimate community of belonging. It is a human imaging of the future in the children of the mothers.

## 7.7 Concluding Summary

In the 'irruption within the irruption' of rural black women for land and life, contending with both the legacy of apartheid and the ongoing force of the traditional patriarchy of customary law and practice with respect to land ownership and use, the power of a holistic relationality to transform consciousness and structures is manifest in both spirituality and strategy. The discourse and praxis of rural women throughout the TLRC communities is critical yet inclusive, involving themselves, their children, their men, their ancestors, God and the land. While the land may be 'the land of our forefathers' (*lefatse la bo 'Ntat'a rona*) it is also the land of the foremothers and mother earth: birthing and nurturing life in community, relating sons and daughters alike to its soil in a religio-cultural and familial-social ethic of belonging. The inter-play between rights and relationality is foregrounded in a women's

<sup>31</sup> In chapter one ('Toward a Feminist Critical Hermeneutics') of her influential *In Memory of Her*, Schüssler Fiorenza writes: 'Rather than *abandon* the memory of our forefathers' sufferings and hopes in our common patriarchal Christian past, Christian feminists *reclaim* their sufferings and struggles in and through the subversive power of the 'remembered past.' If the enslavement and colonisation of people becomes total when their history is destroyed because solidarity with the faith and suffering of the dead is made impossible, then a feminist biblical hermeneutics has the task of becoming a 'dangerous memory' that reclaims the religious suffering and engagement of the dead. Such a 'subversive memory' not only keeps alive the suffering and hopes of Christian women in the past but also allows for a universal solidarity of sisterhood with all women of the past, present and future who follow the same vision' (1983: 31, italics hers).



*hermeneutics* of birthright and belonging, as symbolised by the umbilical relationship between mother and child. The brokenness of the community of male and female on the land is related to the estrangement of male and female from the land, threatening the bleak prospect of a loss of *ubuntu*: the inclusive web of relationality, identity and life between and among past, present and future generations, God and the land. The holistic, transformative relationality of women's *hermeneutics*, biblical and social, seeks to heal this brokenness in an inclusive community of equality and reciprocal love, and informs current debates concerning the status of customary law and practice in the light of the rights of women entrenched in the new constitution.

## CHAPTER 8

### Implications for a Grounded Praxis of *Mayibuye iAfrika!*

The TLRC is very disappointed that in spite of all the efforts of trying to engage the government to expedite the restitution side of the government's land reform programme ... restitution has become one of those big terms used by politicians which cannot be implemented because of reasons known only to themselves ... We believe the Commission has become too academic in dealing with restitution cases. The TLRC believe that the rural communities are now being crucified for claiming their land back.

TLRC Press Statement,  
27 September 1996.

We will not find common ground until everyone has some ground.

Klippiess Kritzingers<sup>1</sup>

This chapter is both a conclusion and a call for further research. While it will discuss variously the implications of a grounded theology of land restitution for the government's land reform programme, internal challenges facing rural communities, the discipline of theological ethics and the praxis of the churches with respect to land, it will also indicate points at which the current state of discussion and debate is unsatisfactory, requiring a more sincere and sustained hearing between and among all actors.

A theology of land restitution grounded in the discourse and praxis of rural land-less communities has revealed itself to be an inter-traditional and multivalent integrality, wherein the conjoining of religio-cultural, historical-legal, socio-economic, ecological and political analyses proceeds along the pathways of a relational rationality which asks *who* before it asks *why*, and asks *why* in the context of *who*. The criticality of a grounded theology is practised within the context of its relationality. Further, the land itself is a player within this holistic relationality, a medium relating God and people in a community of life. As argued above, the land is its people - past, present and future generations, male and female - before it is an issue, and thus may be legitimately abstracted as an issue for analysis only insofar as that abstraction respects and operates within the relational integrality of land and people. To say this is in no

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<sup>1</sup> Klippiess Kritzingers, in discussion during a meeting of the SACC's Ad Hoc Committee on a Theology of Land, Khotso House, Johannesburg, 29 May, 1991.

way to downplay the importance of land as an issue in the new South Africa; on the contrary, it to foreground the multi-layered importance of the land as issue *in the lives of its people*. The relationality of *Mayibuye iAfrika* is personal, intimate and multivalent, involving the very being and identity of rural land-less communities. In a critically inclusive relationality of people, land and God, a grounded theological ethics of land restitution addresses issues of injustice (e.g. with respect to race, class, gender and ecology) by narrating individual and communal *memoria passionis* of the uprooting and estrangement of people from the land and from each other, by engaging in anamnestic solidarity with past victims of dispossession and proleptic solidarity with future sons and daughters of the soil, by waging co-ordinated struggles that employ an array of strategies linking *borapedi* and praxis in a prophetic pragmatism to return to the land and restore and transform community life on the land, and by celebrating together the return of land and people to each other in a reciprocal *Mayibuye iAfrika* - when and where possible.

The chapter will begin in the graveyard of the Batloun at Putfontein in Coligny District, North West Province, and discuss the struggle of the Batloun for land restitution as a paradigmatic case in which the thesis may be said to be recapitulated. The implications of a grounded theology of *Mayibuye iAfrika* for land restitution claims will be explored with reference to recent developments in the Batloun struggle. We will then consider more briefly the implications of the thesis for internal challenges facing the communities, for the discipline of theological ethics with special reference to the questions of method and hermeneutics, and for the praxis of the churches with respect to struggles for land, including its own.

## **8.1 Implications for Land Restitution Claims**

### **8.1.1 The Claim of the Batloun of Putfontein**

On Friday, 20 September 1996, the following invitation was faxed by the secretary of the TLRC, William Mokwala, to the Regional Commissioner for Land Restitution, Ms. Emma Mashinini:

You are cordially invited to address a meeting of the Batloun community together with other land claiming communities at Putfontein graveyard, at 11h00 on Saturday the 28<sup>th</sup> September 1996. These people submitted their claims to the former government's ACLA or CLA, but to date their land has not been delivered to them nor have they been informed about progress towards the resolution of their claim. The issue is now becoming urgent as they need to know that their problems are being taken seriously, and that their land will be returned to them soon. Your presence will be greatly appreciated by the claiming communities (directions to Putfontein enclosed, TLRC 1996a).

The significance of the graveyard as venue was, as should come as no surprise, both spiritual and strategic, and will be discussed below. In a press statement issued a week later at the annual general meeting of the TLRC, the Batlounge community announced its intention to re-occupy its ancestral land at Putfontein and provided a grounded analysis of the historical and political background of their struggle. The statement covers 110 years of history, 90 of those years in its first two sentences:

The Putfontein farms were bought in 1886 and the Batlounge tribe settled there ever since. In 1976 the tribe was forcefully removed by the National Party's apartheid government in terms of its racial laws (Batlounge 1996: 1).<sup>2</sup>

Already a number of key points have been made: 1) the Batlounge, having purchased their land in 1886, had *registered* rights in land at the time of their dispossession; 2) the tribe also has the right of beneficial occupation, having lived on the Putfontein farms since (at least) 1886; 3) thus, when the apartheid government of the National Party forcibly removed the Batlounge, it dispossessed the tribe of both its registered and unregistered rights in land (cf. the Bakwena ba Mogopa and the Bakubung ba Ratheo above); and 4) the notation of the year of removal, 1976, and the phrase 'in terms of its racial laws' are aimed at the Restitution Act (1994), which stipulates that communities claiming land restitution must show that their dispossession happened after 19 June 1913 (Natives Land Act) and as a result of racially discriminatory legislation and practice.

The middle paragraphs of the statement focus on the post-dispossession period, 1976-1996, and foreground the dissatisfaction of the Batlounge with the 'semi-desert' to which they were relocated and their struggles with a succession of government ministers, departments and commissions, including the current CRLR:

The tribe has always been dissatisfied with conditions at Ramatlabama - the place where we are presently residing. Ramatlabama is a semi-desert, the soil is too sandy and not conducive

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<sup>2</sup> The Batlounge comprise one of the (tribes) of the Batswana: the Elephant Tribe. We have already encountered the Bakwena (Crocodile Tribe) in Mogopa and the Bakubung (Hippo Tribe) in Molotstad. While the word 'tribe' may not be completely satisfactory, it is preferred to 'clan' in TLRC statements in the English language. The Barolong, whom we have met in Matlwang and Ikageng, are also a tribe of the Batswana, the referent of their name being not an animal totem but the dialect of Setswana that they speak. The Batlounge statement speaks of both the tribe and the community: for purposes of their Land Restitution Claim the Batlounge have organised themselves as the Batlounge Community and are represented by a democratically-elected land claims committee chaired by Peter Ntshwe. The shift in discourse from tribe to community signals a shift in the approach of the Batlounge to local government: from traditional structures of leadership towards a more democratic structure that does not discriminate between royalty and commoners, nor between men and women. That said, it should be noted that the current chief of the Batlounge (not the chief at the time of the removal) is playing his part in the restitution struggle and is not held in disrepute by his people, being only 18 years of age at the time of the removal.



for crop farming. The climate is also not good for human survival. Putfontein, on the contrary, is a place of fertile soils and good climate for both crops and human life. Putfontein falls within the maize triangle. Putfontein is also a place for minerals and diamonds are abundant.

The community resisted the removal and took the government to court in 1977. Refer for example to the cases of John Mogorosi and Lulu Shole versus the minister of Bantu Development and also John Shole and Lulu Shole versus the Minister of Bantu Development and Co-operation. The tribe lost the first case and then made an appeal which ruled in their favour. The Prime Minister of the day had to convene a special meeting of parliament to deal with the case. Having been removed by force, the tribe found itself splitting. Those who surrendered were removed to Ramatlabama by the government. Those who disliked Ramatlabama went to Tlhatlhaganyane and others to Gannalaagte.

In 1990 the tribe started organising itself again. The struggle to claim its land began. The claim was lodged with the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) and later transferred to the Commission on Land Allocation (CLA). Unfortunately, because Putfontein was referred to as one of the private land cases, CLA could also not deal with the case. When the Restitution Act was passed in 1994 and the Land Claims Commissioner was appointed in 1995, the tribe was led to believe that it was going to be easy to claim and get its land back, only to find out later that the opposite was actually the case. Since the Putfontein claim was transferred from the CLA to the Commission of the Restitution of Land Rights (CRLR), very little (if anything) has been done or achieved. The case has not been taken to court for a hearing (Batloun 1996: 1).

Many of the points raised by the Batloun will be familiar by now. Let us begin with the land itself. A sharp contrast is drawn in the statement between Ramatlabama and Putfontein. The resettlement area is a 'semi-desert' with sandy soil and a climate 'not conducive to human survival'; Putfontein, located in the maize triangle, is a place of fertile soil with a good climate for agriculture and human life. On the one hand we have the 'dumping ground' of relocation, a 'desert of deprivation' marked by barrenness, poverty and death, and on the other hand we have the ancestral home of the Batloun, a place of fertility, prosperity and life. The names of two of the resettlement areas tell their own story: *Tlhatlhaganyane* is a Tswana word that means 'piled on top of each other in layers'; *Gannalaagte* is a composite of the Tswana verb *go ganna*, to refuse to, and the Afrikaans word *laagte*, meaning a low lying stretch of land. 'The people called it Gannalaagte,' states Abram Maja of the SACC, 'because they were refusing to go to that resettlement area after their removal.' The reference to sandy soil in Ramatlabama recalls Willis Ngobe's analysis in Dingleydale that the history of dispossession in South Africa must include both quantitative and qualitative aspects: it is not only that whites took 94% (later reduced in law [1936] if not completely in practice to 87%) of the land surface of South Africa (and all mineral rights), but they also took the *best* of the land, the places with '*long soils*' (so called because they retain water and thus do not require nearly as much rain or irrigation) as opposed to marginal lands with sandy soils. Whites may reply that the 'best' of South Africa's soil did not stretch far enough even for their smaller numbers,

an argument not without validity but which serves further to reinforce the validity of the claim by their black dispossessees that their dispossession consigned them to a life of punishing serfdom on now-white farms,<sup>3</sup> of poverty and death in marginal dumping grounds, or of family-breaking migratory labour back and forth between rural, peri-urban and urban areas. The reference to infertile soil and inhospitable climate also recalls a declaration of the Setlhare people. In response to a question concerning what if any compensation they had been paid when relocated from a fertile area at the base of the Drakensberg escarpment in Mpumalanga to a thorny, arid stretch of the Lowveld between Acornhoek and Kruger National Park, the Setlhare maintained, 'All they gave us were instructions and malaria! This land is not fit for people!'<sup>4</sup> A grounded analysis of land is thus both qualitative and quantitative: rural black communities were displaced from fertile land and relocated to marginal land unable to carry without further degradation the increased densities of human and animal populations. It is not only a question of what percentage of the land was 'white' but also of what percentage of *arable* land was 'white'. In short it is a question of the sustainability of life on the land and thus a question of ethics.

The issue of water rights and access to water is an essential consideration in such a qualitative analysis, as manifest in numerous campaigns for water in rural communities throughout South Africa. Women have taken the lead in organising, marching and lobbying for clean and sufficient water supplies for their communities from Komaggas in Namaqualand to Moutse in Mpumalanga (NLC 1992: 23; RWM 1994: 26-32; TRAC ).<sup>5</sup> As Vogel and Drummond have argued persuasively, 'The "green" issues in the country cannot be separated from the "brown" issues which have their origins in the political and socio-economic policies

<sup>3</sup> Durkje Gilfillan of the LRC has argued convincingly in the case of Mr Daniel Mtshwene, a labour tenant, that a person can be dispossessed of a right in land without physically having been removed from the land (1995b: 3). Many black South Africans found themselves working the same land their fathers and mothers had worked, but now as dispossessed serfs on land the legal title of which was held by a white farmer - at whose pleasure or displeasure they stayed or were evicted (with or without trekpass).

<sup>4</sup> Oral evidence given at a research hearing in Buffelshoek A, Bushbuckridge District, Northern Province, 1 August 1996, unpublished.

<sup>5</sup> The banners of a women's march on the (then) Transvaal Provincial Administration organised by the RWM in Moutse in September 1992, which brought together over 3000 representatives of 42 villages in the area, provide us with a grounded discourse on the crisis: '*Meetsi ke bophelo!*' 'Water is life!' 'We ask water for our cattle and for us, our plants and our vegetables!' 'We want water and electricity, school buildings and healthcare facilities!' 'We need justice!' 'Hope you are not deaf!' Mam Lydia Kompe declared, 'This march has been initiated by the Rural Women's Movement in the region. The women did not want to march for the sake of marching, it was to pressurise the government to negotiate on water in particular because it is one of the burning issues in the region' (NLC 1992: 23). The statistics with respect to water and arable land in South Africa paint a grim picture, quantifying what is at stake in rural struggles for limited resources: approximately 53% of the population do not have access to clean water, and 65% of South Africa's land surface is unsuitable for dryland farming, having an annual rainfall of less than the agricultural minimum for successful crop farming (Vogel and Drummond 1995: 87-88).

of apartheid' (1995: 85). The Batlounge struggle to return to Putfontein in the maize belt of the North West is thus a struggle to return from brown to green, from gradual inexorable death to life. With respect to mineral rights on the Putfontein farms ('diamonds are abundant'), South African law holds that mineral rights are separate from surface rights, and thus the Batlounge would have to make a separate case for government expropriation of the mineral rights to the farms to support their need and desire to develop their land. The right of the land itself to 'rehabilitation' following mining operations must also be addressed, preferably by those holding the mineral rights.<sup>6</sup>

The Batlounge statement also makes reference to a legal strategy employed in resistance to the removal in 1977: the Batlounge win on appeal in court only to lose subsequently in parliament. That the successful appeal of the Batlounge is described as having met with specially-convened parliamentary action recalls a line in André Brink's novel *A Dry White Season*: a prominent lawyer with a successful track record representing victims of apartheid seeks to dissuade a potential client with the words, 'Every time I won a case they changed the law' (Brink 1979). The sovereignty of parliament over the courts under apartheid (Bindman 1988) ensured that even successful legal strategies could not prevent the removals and relocations of 'grand apartheid' from taking place, nor gain redress for their victims thereafter.

Further, the statement acknowledges that the forced removal effected divisions within the tribe. The Batlounge, estranged from their ancestral land, became estranged from each other in at least three different resettlement areas. It was 'those who surrendered' who were removed to Ramatlabama; others rejected Ramatlabama and went to Tlhatlhaganyane or Gannalaagte. The divide and rule tactics employed by the apartheid regime throughout rural South Africa were again successful in the case of the Batlounge (cf. the Bakwena ba Mogopa above). Given the widespread legacy of internal division wrought by the forced removals, all communities and tribes seeking land restitution do well to ask themselves: what potential for inner healing and unity is occasioned by a return to ancestral land, and how is that potential to be realised? That the press release is written from the point of view of those currently residing at Ramatlabama (see third sentence) indicates that there has been a reunion of Batlounge in the struggle for restitution.

The paragraph that begins 'In 1990 the tribe started organising itself again,' signals the participation of the Batlounge in the irruption of rural black communities into the land agenda of South Africa. At the same time, it must be noted immediately that the struggle

<sup>6</sup> See the discussion in Durkje Gilfillan, 'Putfontein: A Restitution Case Study,' Pretoria, 12 September 1996, unpublished.



launched by the tribe in 1990 was to 'claim its land' and not to re-occupy to its land outright - a prudent course of action given that their land had been sold by the government after their removal to white farmers who could be expected to defend it. The land claim is launched against the state as respondent, and so begins a litany of frustration: first with the ACLA, then with CLA, and finally with the current CRLR. Of great significance is the reference to the claim of the Batlounge as being 'one of the private land cases,' indicating that the land of the tribe is now in the hands of private and not state interests (in this case fifteen white farmers). As will be discussed below, the delay in dealing with the Batlounge claim has to do in part with conflict between the government (DLA and CRLR) and current landowners over the amount of compensation due to the current landowners upon expropriation, and the principles upon which the determination of that compensation should be based. For the Batlounge, still experiencing landless frustration in the post-election (April 1994) phase of the transition period, the land reform programme of the government has become but one more way-station on a continuum of delay and disappointed expectations, casting doubt on the government's *bona fides*. A more activist strategy of re-occupation designed to force the government's hand was thus decided upon by the community in July 1996. Not wanting to rush into confrontation with the government over what would be interpreted as a land invasion, however, the community and its executive committee decided to test the catalytic value of their decision to re-occupy. Thus it is that the Minister of Land Affairs and the Chief and Regional Land Claims Commissioners find themselves invited to attend the Batlounge graveyard meeting:

In the community general meeting held on 28 July 1996 in the Putfontein graveyard, it was resolved to rather re-occupy the Putfontein land on 27 September 1996. However, in a meeting of the Batlounge Returnees Executive Committee and the Land Claims Commissioner held in Pretoria on 28 August 1996 the Commissioner pleaded with the executive for the community not to invade the land.

Back home the community held another general meeting on 8 September 1996 and agreed that the date of re-occupation be extended from 27 September 1996 to 2 November 1996 on condition that:

1) On 28 September 1996 the Minister of Land and Agricultural Affairs, Mr. Derek Hanekom, comes to receive the memorandum personally from the Batlounge community at the Putfontein graveyard.

2) That his address to the community on this day spells out clearly the possibilities of the community regaining their land rights before 2 November 1996.

3) The Chief Land Claims Commissioner and the Regional Land Claims Commissioner accompany the Minister of old Putfontein to receive the memorandum.

If the Minister fails to attend or does not respond satisfactorily to the community, we may decide to re-occupy on the same day, i.e. 28 September 1996.

The Putfontein community calls on the government to state clearly its intention about the Restitution Act. The community must know on 28 September 1996 whether their claim will be resolved in accordance with this Act or not. If the position of the claim is still the same as that of ACLA, then this too must be made known.

The Putfontein community has become frustrated and helpless. The whole exercise of claiming our land has become so academic that we can no longer cope. As it is, there is no



reason that can be given by anybody nor even the government as to what is actually delaying the progress of our claim (Batloun 1996: 1-2).

The Batloun's decision to make 28 September a day of reckoning between itself and the government is seen to arise from its grounded critique of the Restitution Act itself, and of a process 'so academic that we can no longer cope.' This critique was given sharper focus in a statement of the TLRC issued in solidarity with the Batloun at the 27 September press conference:

The TLRC is very disappointed that in spite of all the efforts of trying to engage the government to expedite the restitution side of (its) land reform programme ... restitution has become one of those big terms used by politicians which cannot be implemented because of reasons known only to themselves ... We believe that the Commission has become too academic in dealing with restitution cases ... rural communities are now being crucified for claiming their land back.

We appeal to the government to come out clearly about its stand on restitution. It appears that the Act was only enacted to encourage the rural communities to vote for the government. The government must come out clearly and tell us if it has the power to expropriate, or whether it nurses the feeling of the farmers at the expense of rural communities ...

The communities have lost faith in the present process of land reform. We believe that the government is using delaying tactics to frustrate communities who are claiming their land back. These delays are actually encouraging communities to adopt the methods of squatting, which at this stage appears to be the best method and is becoming more attractive to many communities. The government may be forced to deal with crises, since they do not seem to be in a position to prevent them (TLRC 1996: 1-2).

It is an aggressive statement from the ground, employing a searching hermeneutic of suspicion, challenging the ANC government to deliver on its promise of land restitution. In a charge that echoes those levelled by the TLRC at the previous government, the new government is accused of 'using delaying tactics' to frustrate communities who, having already lost faith in the land reform programme, are now threatening re-occupation of their ancestral lands - an event which they know will be viewed by the government not as re-occupation but as land invasion and squatting. Peter Ntshwe, commenting on the outraged 'crucified' assertion, refers to the prolonged pain felt by communities in the land claims process, "'Crucified" because of the long and tortuous process they have to follow when claiming their land. The communities cannot be expected to fill in these land claim forms. It cannot be done by the ordinary man in the street. Too much information is demanded in those forms. It is regarded as another interrogation. Whereas the dispossession happened very quickly, and all this information was not required!"<sup>7</sup> It is a disturbing post-election witness to the 'crucified among the cross-bearers' (Mofokeng 1983). With respect to the 'academic' nature of the process,

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 1.

Ntshwe states, 'Too academic because of all of the researches that have to be done. Months and years now. And because of all of the terms in the Restitution Act ... I do not attach so much blame on the Commission itself - it is under the Act. It is the Act itself that is the problem.' Elaborating, Ntshwe claims that it is the very people who dispossessed the Batloun who are benefiting from the Restitution Act, 'The Act is playing into the hands of the current white landowners and their agricultural unions. The communities are saying this is enough now. All this information gathering and research. All these delays concerning white landowners. They have been patient long enough' (Ntshwe 1996: 1). The numbers support the Batloun position. By the end of October 1996, some 11,131 claims for the restitution of land had been received by the CRLR, of which only five had been referred to the Land Claims Court, and one had been successfully approved (the return of land to the Elandskloof Community in the Western Cape).<sup>8</sup>

The statement, 'The government must come out clearly and tell us if it has the power to expropriate, or whether it nurses the feeling of the farmers at the expense of rural communities,' is a complex of provocation and pain that goes to the heart of the Putfontein case. The TLRC knows as well as any organisation that the property clause in the new constitution empowers the government to expropriate private land in the public interest, including a specific provision for expropriation in cases of restitution (see note 12 below). It is also well aware that the new government drafted and enacted the Restitution Act to legislate material redress for communities and individuals dispossessed as a result of past racially discriminatory laws and practice. From the ground, however, The Batloun and the TLRC communities in general are now deeply suspicious of the entire process. Was land reform just a plank in an election campaign? Does this government support rural land-less communities *ka sebele* (in reality) or does it <sup>in</sup> fact 'nurse' (the image is of motherhood) the 'feelings' of white farmers at the expense of rural black communities? One cannot imagine a more searching challenge nor a sharper goad to the DLA and the CRLR.

Yet the claim of the Batloun is more complicated than their public provocation admits. Their lawyer, Durkje Gilfillan, has summarised the position usefully in her brief, 'Putfontein: A Restitution Case Study':

The claim is technically complex. It contains both communal and individual land rights; common law as well as customary rights; mineral rights and mining permits; and servitudes held over the land by ESCOM and Transnet [electricity and transportation para-statals]. Two of the farms, Putfontein and Sterkfontein, were held both communally and individually as

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Minister of Land and Agricultural Affairs, Derek Hanekom, to State President Nelson Mandela, quoted in the *Johannesburg Star*, 8 November 1996, p.3.

plots. Vogelstruisknop individually as plots, and Omega and Wildfontein communally with no plots.

The plot owners, though claiming individually, see themselves as part of the community with the need to preserve unity amongst the members. The land itself, for purposes of restitution, is perceived as one parcel of land by both the community and the present owners. For these reasons the Putfontein farms were initially seen as a single restitution claim.

The issue of compensation to present owners has already given rise to a court application. It was dismissed in favour of the Minister of Land Affairs, but still remains unsolved (Gilfillan 1996: 1).

According to Gilfillan the delay in the resolution of the Batlounge claim has largely to do with its complexity in general (individual rights/communal rights, common law/customary law, surface rights/mineral rights, para-statal servitudes, single community claim/multiple family plots, current owners/government) and with two conflicts in particular: one internal, involving Batlounge with title to individual plots, and the other external, involving the conflict between white farmers and the government concerning the calculation of just and equitable compensation in this case. With respect to the former conflict, disputes have arisen within some of the families laying claim to individual plots concerning who should claim title. In some cases the plot was, after the death of the original plot owner, registered at common law in the name of the eldest son, with the intention that he would administer the land for the benefit of the family as a whole, in accordance with customary law. Any exclusive right claimed by the eldest son, the registered owner, is thus contested by his siblings as contrary to the intention of the original plot owner, their father, and to customary law and practice designed to benefit all members of the family. In short, the eldest son was never intended to be a common law owner (Gilfillan 1996:2). Further, the land rights of the daughters of the family, upheld in the new constitution and in the constitution of the Batlounge community, challenge the patriarchy of customary law and practice, demanding its transformation.<sup>9</sup>

Family disputes over the ownership of plots have been, for Gilfillan, part of the delay in the resolution of the Batlounge claim as a whole, which in its present definition includes in one claim both the communally-held and individually-held land of its community members on the five farms in question (Putfontein and Sterfontein [mixed communal and individual holdings], Vogelstruisknop [individual holdings], and Omega and Wildfontein [communal holding]). Seeking a way forward, Gilfillan proposes that the Batlounge claim be 'unpacked into more manageable portions,' with the restitution claims on the farms which the tribe held

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<sup>9</sup> Women are represented on both the rural and urban committees of the Batlounge Community, and the land rights of both married and unmarried women are upheld in the constitution and the (pending) Community Property Association of the Batlounge.

communally, Omega and Wildfontein, being processed first, and the remaining farms, Putfontein, Sterfontein and Vogelstruisknop, taken forward thereafter in conjunction with efforts to address conflicts within families concerning the ownership of individual plots. Recent meetings held with the Regional Land Claims Commissioner, Emma Mashinini, have resolved to do just that. The Distribution and Transfer of Certain State Land Act (No. 119 of 1993) allows for the farms to be expropriated and held by the state while a commissioner, appointed by the state, liaises with the community to determine who has which rights in the land claimed. Following this process of identification, the Minister of Land Affairs can then designate the land. In this way the restitution claims for the three farms could be processed by the CRLC before the current plot owners had resolved their internal conflicts over who should have rights to the land, and what those rights should be. With no little relevance for the Batlounge's decision to re-occupy, Gilfillan concludes:

This procedure will have the positive effect that the claimants will see concrete results, release the pressure on the Commission and lessen the possibility of conflict which inevitably accompanies any possibility of land invasion. Regular consultation, transparency and regular sharing of information will ensure that the community as a whole including the plot owners remain in the process (1996: 4).

While Gilfillan's proposal is likely the only way to get the claim moving again, there remain some concerns from a grounded perspective. The sense and structure of community must be retained in such an 'unpacking' process, with sufficient consultation entered into to ensure that all members of the Batlounge claiming community agree with the strategy as proposed, or have an opportunity to air their objections, have them addressed, and modify the strategy if necessary. Unity, both in the claiming of restitution and in the post-restitution stage of reconstruction and development, is too important an issue and too delicate a dynamic to allow to go untested in the proposal. Further, the proposal reflects the extent to which land restitution has become not a people-driven process but a legislation-driven and a legal-and-academic-elite-driven process. The consultation, transparency and accountability that Gilfillan so eloquently calls for may be possible only when the Commission opens its meetings to communities and individuals claiming restitution - a move that would also help to address the obstructive influence of old-guard career bureaucrats in the CRLR.

With respect to the external conflict delaying the processing of the Batlounge claim, while the case brought by the current landowners against the government concerning compensation has been dismissed in the Transvaal Supreme Court,<sup>10</sup> the conflict over the

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<sup>10</sup> M.J. de Villiers and 14 others *versus* the Minister of Public Works, the Land Affairs Board and the Minister of Land Affairs, case number 18214/95. The case was heard in February 1996. A putative deal between the fifteen white farmers and the Department of Public Works wherein the farmers were to be paid R 23 million in



amount of compensation to be paid and the principles upon which it is to be calculated continues to delay the resolution of the claim. The fifteen white farmers in question, working with officials of the Department of Public Works in 1994, thought they had secured an agreement that the amount of compensation would be fixed at R 23 million - an amount seen by rural land-less communities and their alliance partners as outrageous. A press release by TRAC in February 1995 put a fine point on what was at stake, 'If this type of deal is allowed to proceed, the vast majority of clear-cut restitution cases will be rendered financially unviable (never mind ambiguous cases, or redistribution). Land reform will become little more than an expensive way of further enriching the beneficiaries of apartheid.'<sup>11</sup> The observation by TRAC that R 23 million represented a 'substantial portion of the restitution budget for the entire country' raises with urgency the 'viability question': does the government, its legislative and legal powers notwithstanding, have the financial power to expropriate? The modification of market-value compensation is thus seen to be both a moral and a financial imperative. As new legislation was passed toward the end of 1994 (e.g. the Restitution Act, signed into law on 17 November 1994) and as progressive interpretations of the relevant sections of the Interim (1993) Constitution (e.g. sections 23, 24 and 28) gained ground and began to modify interpretation of section 12 of the Expropriation Act of 1975 (revealing in the process the need for legislative amendment of that Act), it became clear that the amount of R 23 million was well beyond what was just and equitable compensation in this case. It was not a simple matter of expropriation and compensation at current market value, it was also a matter of restitution.

In determining what 'just and equitable' compensation would be in this and similar cases, the interpretation of section 28 (3) of the Interim 1993 Constitution (section 25 of the New 1996 Constitution) is crucial, with implications not only for restitution but also for resettlement, development and land reform in general.<sup>12</sup> Key questions include the following:

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compensation did not stand up in court. The court found that promises made by officials of government departments were not in themselves binding on the government. Proper procedures of decision-making and documentation had to be followed for there to be said to be an agreement. There having been no legally-binding agreement to pay compensation of R 23 million, the case was dismissed.

<sup>11</sup> TRAC Press Release entitled, 'White Farmers Aim to Get Rich on Land Reform Money,' 28 February 1995, Johannesburg.

<sup>12</sup> The Property Clause (section 25, New Constitution) includes the following provisions in sub-sections (3) and (4): '(3) The amount, timing and manner of compensation must be just and equitable, reflecting an equitable balance between the public interest and the interests of those affected, having regard to all relevant factors, including - (a) the current use of the property; (b) the history of the acquisition and use of the property; (c) the market value of the property; (d) the extent of state investment and subsidy in the acquisition and beneficial capital improvement of the property; and (e) the purpose of the expropriation. (4) For the purposes of this section - (a) the public interest includes the nation's commitment to land reform, and to reforms to bring about equitable access to all South Africa's natural resources; and (b) property is not limited to land.' Sections (6), (7) and (8) elaborate on the 'nation's commitment to land reform' and equitable access: '(6) A person or community

What is just and equitable compensation in an expropriation case that is also a restitution case? By whom, upon what basis and following what procedure should it be determined? How is the history of acquisition to be weighed [section 25 (3) (b)]? To what extent and following what guidelines must the current market value of claimed land (itself a valuation not free from socio-political interest) be modified to account for advantages gained by white farmers (through government purchase subsidies and loans with soft rates of interest) in the acquisition and cultivation of formerly black land during the apartheid era [section 25 (3) (d)]? How does government prioritise claims in light of the very real financial restrictions placed on its power to expropriate for the purposes of restitution?

The Land Affairs Board, responsible for the determination of compensation in cases of state expropriation, deliberated over the course of several months in 1995 on the Putfontein case, its first 'restitution case' and thus a test case, eventually coming to the conclusion in November 1995 that it could *not*, because of internal disagreements between and among its members over the principles upon which just and equitable compensation was to be calculated, reach any decision concerning the amount of compensation that the government should pay in this case. Moreover, this conclusion, in effect a capitulation to the perceived non-determinability of compensation in a restitution case, was reached in spite of the fact that the legal action of the current landowners against the government was pending in court. The land valuer, Mr CM Muller, had assessed the current market value of the land to be R 14,606,200 (including improvements made by the current landowners but not including their financial losses) - an amount already significantly lower than the R 23 million for which the white farmers were suing. From this amount were then subtracted various amounts to account for financial advantages gained by the current owners in the form of an initial purchase price subsidy ('below market' or purchase price advantage) and in the form of the gap between the lower (softer) rate of interest on loans they enjoyed compared to the prevailing norm during the years 1981-1994 (interest rate advantage). The members of the Land Affairs Board, for reasons that will become clear below, could not agree on the calculation of either advantage. With respect to the calculation of the purchase price advantage, while most of the Board's

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whose tenure of land is legally insecure as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided in an Act of Parliament, either to tenure which is legally secure, or to comparable redress. (7) A person or community dispossessed of property after 19 June 1913 as a result of past racially discriminatory laws or practices is entitled, to the extent provided by an Act of Parliament, either to restitution of that property, or to equitable redress. (8) No provision of this section may impede the state from taking legislative and other measures to achieve land reform or equitable access to natural resources, in order to redress the results of past racial discrimination, provided that these legislative and other measures are reasonable and justified in an open and democratic society' (Property Clause, Final Draft).

members accepted Mr Muller's valuation, Z.J. Kganyago found his estimates of market values in 1981 (the year of purchase from the government) to fall far below those of the Agricultural Credit Committee (ACC), which he took to be the more accurate. When the ACC values for 1981 were used in place of those of Muller, a higher calculation of the purchase price advantage (the difference between market value in 1981 and actual price paid by the farmers) resulted, thus lowering the amount of compensation to be paid to each farmer.

With respect to the calculation of interest rate advantage the differences within the Board were more complex, with its white members calculating a lower advantage than its black members, who, adopting what they took to be the more defensible position, calculated a higher interest rate advantage, resulting in lower amounts of compensation to each farmer. Mr ZJ Kganyago, in his recommendation to the Land Affairs Board (LAB), made the following points with respect to the sharp debate within the LAB concerning the calculation of advantage, and its implications for the integrity of the Board in restitution cases:

Interest rate figures from the SARB [South African Reserve Bank] clearly indicated that the average mortgage bond rate charged by commercial banks over the past fourteen years (1981-1994) was about 17%; however, the mortgage bond rate of the Land and Agricultural Bank over the same period was about 14%. It is my submission, contrary to that of the Chairman, Mr PC van Blommestein [who had argued in a memorandum for a capitalisation rate of 7.5% over the fourteen years on the advantage gained], that a capitalisation rate of 14% on the loan is a fact well supported and any deviations from it for whatever reasons would be absurd and would bring the LAB into disrepute. *Vacillations by the LAB on matters of principle for the sole reason of appeasing certain sectors of our community will cast doubt on the integrity, role and functions of the LAB.* Returns on fixed deposits are reviewed periodically. Mr C. Muller's motivation for a fixed rate of 10.5% applicable in 1981 for the whole 14 year (period) does not hold. Thus an average yield on fixed deposits over the 14 year period has been utilised viz 13.7%. Adjustment for the below market price purchase value is 10% based on average yield of land prices' (italics mine).<sup>13</sup>

In the event, the farmers were charged a fixed rate of 5% by the Agricultural Credit Board (ACB). Van Blommestein's memorandum argues that because the rate of 5% was fixed for the ACB by the Agricultural Credit Act of 1966 (section 20 A), the ACB could not earn more than 5% on its money and thus the advantage gained by the farmers from the (soft) 5% rate should be 'disregarded'. While Van Blommestein's argument is instrumentally reasonable, it ignores the racially discriminatory context (legal and practical) in which the white farmers and the ACB were operating - a point made with clarity by Board member M. Mbongwa (see below). The Act which he cites was itself part of the white legislative bias of apartheid, particularly in that the National Party in the 1960s was doing everything in its power to reward and retain the support of the Boers (farmers, many of whom were indeed struggling) who had

<sup>13</sup> Z.J. Kganyago, written submission to the Land Affairs Board, Pretoria, 14 November 1995, unpublished, p.1.



brought it to power in 1948. It should come as no surprise that Mr Kganyago rejects Van Blommestein's argument, and that he does so in such uncompromising terms.

A look at the calculations and their proponents will quantify what was at stake in the Putfontein claim, and concretise ethical discourse with respect to the issue of compensation in restitution cases.<sup>14</sup> Van Blommestein calculated the total compensation to be paid to the fifteen farmers to be 13,465,578, and Mr JM Kleynhans calculated it to be 13,528,200 - amounts which reflect minimal deductions from the market value (Muller's 14,606,200) for purchase price and interest rate advantages. On the other hand, Ms T Simbi (of the LAPC) and Mr ZJ Kganyago calculated the total compensation to be 5,451,263 and 4,061,712 respectively, with Mr M Mbongwa concurring with Simbi - amounts reflecting markedly higher calculations of past advantage to be deducted from the current market value. The difference between the highest and the lowest calculation of compensation may be expressed as follows: that of Kleynhans is 333% of that of Kganyago, and the average calculation of Van Blommestein and Kleynhans (13,496,889) is 284% of the average of that of Simbi, Kganyago and Mbongwa (4,756,488). To call these significant differences is an understatement. In the case of individual farmers the differences are indeed incommensurable: where Van Blommestein has calculated that WJC Roux, the first farmer on the list, is entitled to receive 131,803, Simbi has him entitled to receive 34,170; where Van Blommestein and Kleynhans have BV Delwery (not the original owner) entitled to receive 1,060,000 (Muller's determination of the current market value of his 753 hectares, with no deductions for advantage), Simbi and Kganyago have excluded him from their calculations altogether; and, in the most dramatic cases, where Kleynhans has GJ van Zyl entitled to receive 812,500 and GPJ Coetzer to receive 561,500, Kganyago has calculated *negative* values for both of *minus* 109,242 and *minus* 142,586 respectively.

At this point we may usefully ask: for whom must the compensation be just and equitable? Again we are dealing with the relationality of justice: the compensation must be just and equitable not only for the current landowners being expropriated but also for those who have lost so much in dispossession and who stand to lose their (legal) future on the land if the government expends its restitution budget on a few expensive cases, leaving it financially unable to assist other communities with solid restitution claims. Masiphula Mbongwa, in his submission to the LAB, articulates usefully the basis for what we may call a restitution interpretation over and against a purely market-based interpretation of 'just and equitable':

<sup>14</sup> All amounts are in South African Rands.



Throughout this exercise the assumption is that normal market conditions are applicable when a probable market price is being determined. This assumption implies, among other things, the following: equal access to prevailing market conditions for all farmers; the purchase price is approximately equal to the probable market price; improvements are financed under conditions that are accessible to all; and normal market conditions and options are not unduly curtailed. The Putfontein Farms do not meet the above market conditions. Between 1981 and up to well into the 1990s: 1) African, Asian and Coloured farmers were effectively barred from market conditions regarding their unhindered access to farmlands in the country; 2) African, Asian and Coloured farmers were effectively barred from the Agricultural Credit Board assistance; 3) most of the Putfontein Farms were purchased below the market price; 4) improvement of Putfontein Farms were most probably financed by the Agricultural Credit Board; and 5) most of the Putfontein Farms were sold by the state after expropriating the land from the Batlounge Community in 1977.

Because the Putfontein case involves communities who were excluded not only from the normal market conditions but also from the state assistance measures provided by the Agricultural Credit Board, an argument can be made that the present owners were advantaged when the farms were put on the market and the ACB assisted them to purchase and improve them to their current level of development ... The impact of (this analysis) exerts a downward pressure on the ultimate fair and just price of the subject properties.<sup>15</sup>

That the Board could not in the end reach a determination on compensation, given the disparate calculations of its members and the divergent principles upon which those calculations were based, betrays a deeper division within the LAB. The differences signal a subjacent conflict of conceptualisations and spiritualities of land ownership and material redress within the Board as it sought to interpret what just and equitable compensation in a restitution case should be. Its failure to recommend an amount to the Minister of Land Affairs has contributed substantially to the delay in the resolution of the Batlounge claim, and may be taken as one of the more obvious cases wherein the opportunistic and obstructive gambits of current white landowners have succeeded in frustrating (to date) the moral and material aims of the Restitution Act and the New Constitution. As Kadar Asmal, Louise Asmal and Richard Roberts note in their recent analysis of the prospects of 'reconciliation through truth' in South Africa, 'While hardly anyone today lays claim to having supported apartheid, many of the previously privileged today openly resist measures intended to undo its legacy.'<sup>16</sup>

To return to the Putfontein graveyard, the meeting of 28 September went ahead with the Chief Land Claims Commissioner in attendance, and concluded that the re-occupation would go forward on the new date of 2 November if the Batlounge claim had not been resolved before then. The community called for immediate re-occupation, Seremane called for the community to be patient a little longer, and the Batlounge chief called for moderation, advising

<sup>15</sup> M. Mbongwa, written submission to the Land Affairs Board, Pretoria, 24 October 1995, unpublished, pp.1-2.

<sup>16</sup> Kadar Asmal et al, quoted in *The Sunday Independent*, October 27 1996, p.20. The quote is taken from their recent work, *Reconciliation through Truth: A Reckoning of Apartheid's Criminal Governance*, Cape Town, 1996.

the community to give the government 'a bit more of a chance.' Peter Ntshwe, speaking two weeks after the meeting, said, 'If nothing happens, definitely we are going back.'<sup>17</sup> Concerning the significance of the graveyard as venue for the meeting with government, Peter Ntshwe articulates a by-now familiar linkage between the spiritual and the strategic in local struggles for land restitution:

There were two things there. Normally black people want to include their ancestors in all that they do. To pray and ask them for help in their difficulties concerning returning to their land. And that is very, very important. Second, it was a strategy. The government was called to come to us instead of us going to the government. To come to our land and receive the memo about the re-occupation here in the graveyard of the Batlounge and not in their office in Pretoria. To see the people and listen to their anger.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, Ntshwe stated that the graveyard was never part of the sale of land to private individuals. 'It is still ours,' he declared. Further, the road to the graveyard is a national road, 'so there is no problem with access,' and the community enjoys 'good relations' with the local white farmer, 'We told him that there would be this meeting and there was no problem.' Not surprisingly, the linkages between *borapedi* and praxis in the prophetic pragmatism of the Batlounge are grounded at the graves of their ancestors.

The implications of a grounded theology of land restitution for the *mayibuye* struggle of the Batlounge are already implicit in their praxis. Their theology of land and of land restitution has been an integral part of their *mayibuye* praxis, conjoining hermeneutical and practical dimensions, even as it has been an integral part of who they are as people of the soil. A central aspect of this integral implicative is the nexus between rights and relationality in land restitution claims, to a consideration of which we now turn.

### 8.1.2 The Theological-Ethical Nexus of Rights and Relationality in Land Restitution Claims

In a grounded theology of land restitution the land itself, medium of a living community of God and past, present and future generations, is a nexus of holistic relationality and land rights. Our discussions of grounded hermeneutics in chapter one and of women's hermeneutics in chapter seven, wherein the intimate relationship between people and land was signified as being umbilical and 'womby', indicating for Joe Seremane, Archbishop Ngada and Kenosi Mofokeng among others a socio-legal linkage between birthright and the reciprocal relationality of belonging (people to land and land to people), led us to the conclusion that a

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<sup>17</sup> Peter Ntshwe, op. cit., p.2.

grounded sense of birth and belonging links questions of right and relationality with respect to land restitution.<sup>19</sup> The linkage between right and relationality in *mayibuye* praxis has its roots in African communal tradition on the land, yet seeks to develop the potentiality of those roots more fully with respect to the rights of women. Overall it may be said to participate in the multivalent integrality of the religio-cultural, biographical-familial, historical-legal, ecological, socio-economic and political that lies at the heart of this thesis.

#### 8.1.2.1 A Relational Approach to Rights and Restitution

While the dominant tradition in the West concerning rights discourse and legislation has been to view rights as a *possession* of the rights-holder (e.g. property rights as an exclusive possession), this conceptualisation has been changing. There has been a move away from a purely possessive approach to a more *relational* approach to rights, including the social and ecological implications and responsibilities of, for example, ownership and property rights. Not unsurprisingly, given their emphasis on the personal as the political, women authors are leading the way in shaping an alternative tradition in which rights are viewed as being relational in nature, with the human 'put back' into human rights and the social into social justice in a more narrative, less abstract way. I.M. Young, in her influential work *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), argues that rights are relationships, and have more to do with what people *do* in relation to each other than with what they *have* in relation to each other:

The distributive paradigm implicitly assumes that social justice judgements are about what individual persons have, how much they have, and how that amount compares with what other persons have. This focus on possession tends to preclude thinking about what people are doing, according to what institutional rules, how their doings and havings are structured by institutionalised relations that constitute their positions, and how the combined effect of their doings has recursive effects on their lives ...

Rights are not fruitfully conceived of as possessions. Rights are relationships, not things; they are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relationship to one another. Rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action (1990: 25)

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Peter Ntshwe, TLRC Chairperson and Chairperson of the Batlounge Land Committee, Johannesburg, 7 October 1996, unpublished, p.1.

<sup>19</sup> See the discussion above in chapter seven. The word 'womby' was introduced by Weli Mazamisa in a speech delivered to the SACC Conference on Reconciliation and Healing (World Trade Centre, 23-25 October 1996) as part of his argument that truth is a 'who question.' 'What is truth?' he asked. 'Already this question is an aberration. When we say, "What is truth?" we theorise and follow a Western approach to truth. The question we should ask is, "Who is truth?" Truth is relational! ... In this sense truth may be said to be *womby* and not heady' (quoted from notes taken by the author). Mazamisa's argument, in which he asserts that in Jesus we see the *ubuntu*fication of truth, is discussed in more detail below.



For Young, a view of rights as relationships raises issues not only of distributive outcomes but also issues and narratives of domination and oppression of one group by another in society. Both justice and injustice are relational, and involve peoples' day to day interactions and the institutions that structure those interactions. Justice and injustice are specific and changeable sets of relationships and patterns of relating on the ground, and Young is thus not content with theoretical processes which seek an abstract, universal solution to the injustices manifest in daily living. For example, using John Rawls' contract theory of justice as a foil,<sup>20</sup> she argues for plurivocal, participatory structures and processes in society:

Instead of a fictional contract, we require real participatory structures in which actual people, with their geographical, ethnic, gender and occupational differences, assert their perspectives on social issues within institutions that encourage the representation of their distinct voices' (1990:116).

Land rights may be seen in this context as a set of relationships between people concerning land, and land reform as a process of changing unjust and impoverishing relationships between people, black and white, male and female, concerning land. Such a process, with a stated bias for the redress of the dispossessive legacy of apartheid, will not be content with legislative change but will demand substantive change on the ground: there must be a return of land and people to each other, a moral and material *mayibuye iAfrika*.

The nexus of rights and relationality with respect to land in South Africa has received critical attention in the transition period, particularly with respect to the way in which concepts of common-law land rights have been changing, and may be influenced to change, in response to relevant provisions in the Interim (1993) and New (1996) Constitutions and to a renewed and associated interest in the community land-ethic of customary law (Bennett 1995; Cross 1991; Gilfillan 1995a).<sup>21</sup> Durkje Gilfillan, in her master's thesis 'Common Law and Customary Land Rights in the Context of Section 28 of the Constitution,' argues that concepts of ownership and property rights in common law have been shifting in the international sphere

<sup>20</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Harvard, 1971. Rawls' work has received extensive critical attention in the 25 years since he first published it, not least his 'maximum' or 'difference' principle, which calls for an equal distribution of 'social primary goods' in society, unless unequal distribution can be shown to lead to the maximisation of said 'goods' for the least advantaged: 'All social primary goods - liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the bases of self-respect - are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any or all of these goods is to the advantage of the least favoured' (1971: 303). It is, among other things, to the commodification of social rights as 'goods' or possessions that Young objects.

<sup>21</sup> Gilfillan provides introductory definitions as follows: 'Common-law ownership is traditionally described as a real right, unlimited in its content, which in principle entitles the holder to deal with her property as she pleases to the exclusion of outsiders, subject to private- and public-law limitations. Customary land rights must be understood in the context of close family alliance underpinned by the community land-ethic. It is based on universal access to land and resources by members of the community in return for allegiance to the community and its social values' (1995:1).



from an older view of ownership as being exclusive and absolute to a view which recognises the social responsibilities implied by ownership, and that in South Africa recent changes in constitutional law with respect to ownership and property are compatible with the community land-ethic of African customary law and practise. Motivating her study is the need to redress the legacies of apartheid with respect to land ownership, use and tenure, and to do it in a way that addresses the reciprocal influence of customary and common law traditions in a context of changing conceptualisations of ownership and property rights:

At the basis of the community land-ethic lies the understanding that land-holding has certain social consequences and that rights in land cannot be seen as separate from social commitments to the community to which the landholder belongs. This is indicative of recent developments in the concept of ownership, in terms of which ownership implies not only rights, but also duties; and that as a concept, it must reflect the limiting effects of societal and conservation issues (1995:33).

Arguing that exclusionary interpretations of common-law concepts of ownership and property have become increasingly 'dysfunctional' in terms of social and ecological objectives, Gilfillan concludes:

It is clear that the community land-ethic and recent developments in common-law ownership both reflect an awareness of the limiting effects of societal and conservation issues on ownership. The integration of the concepts contained in both, through a flexible interpretation of the property clause in the Constitution, may well create a concept of land rights capable of developing and integrating existing common-law and customary land-tenure rights (1995:37).

An integrated concept of land rights, provided that such integration is itself a participatory and not an elitist process and subject to ongoing evaluation by all interested parties, does indeed have the potential to facilitate the redress of the dispossessive legacy of apartheid. For this to happen, however, the relational aspect of such an integrated approach to land rights must be addressed on the ground in practical terms. At present, while Gilfillan's thesis is eminently defensible, it is painfully clear, not least to Gilfillan herself in her legal work with dispossessed communities like the Batlounge, that there is as yet no mutuality of commitment between current and former land-holders with respect to redressing the material legacy of apartheid. On the contrary, the manifest commitment of current white landowners continues to be, with few exceptions, to an exclusionary interpretation of ownership and property rights that operates in the context of an oppositional *us-versus-them* model of relationality, wherein white landowners retain the prerogative to define in mutually-exclusive terms who 'us' is, who 'they' are, and why respective interests in land cannot be or become reciprocal interests in land. The subjunctivity of the transition, wherein potentiality is no

guarantee of substantial redress, is thus brought home with sobering force. While an integration of changing common-law conceptualisations of land ownership and property rights with the community land-ethic of African customary tradition concerning land rights may be possible at a legislative and jurisprudential level, the real break-through will have to be made at the local level, where there has been some indication that the prophetic pragmatism of rural black communities may be employed to useful effect with local white farmers (see the Bakubung above).<sup>22</sup>

Moving from the relationality of black and white to that of male and female on the land, it is again the contingency of an 'integrated' conceptualisation of land rights that is most apparent. A common law that recognises and upholds women's rights to own land presents a searching challenge to a patriarchal interpretation and practice of customary law, to which the response of family and community patriarchs has been, as we have seen, more one of resistance than of reform. Moreover, the common law itself must not be taken for granted. As Sheena Duncan has noted, the constitutional negotiations at Kempton Park in 1993 came disturbingly close to excluding, at the behest of traditional (male) leaders, women living under customary law from the protection of the equality clause in the Interim Constitution. How close the chiefs came to securing such an exclusion may be discerned in the shrewd response of Frene Ginwala, now Speaker of Parliament, to the victory of women in resisting such a move, 'We have avoided entrenching inequality' (in Duncan 1994: 67).<sup>23</sup> Beyond legislative protection, the question of equality of participation and power-having remains problematic, and Gilfillan's thesis, its contingency notwithstanding, seems set to retain its cutting edge both within and without rural land-less communities for some time.

<sup>22</sup> The etymology of ownership in Sotho and Tswana provides a point of departure for thinking about reciprocity of ownership and black-white relations in South Africa. In Tswana the verb *ho rua* may mean to inherit, possess, own, or to be rich. Surprisingly from a Western perspective, it is possible to add the reciprocal suffix '*ana*' to *ho rua*. '*Ana*', when added to the end of a verb, signals mutuality. For example, the verb to love, *ho rata*, become *ho ratana*, to love each other. Similarly the verb to understand, *ho utloisisa*, becomes *ho utloisisana*, to understand each other. In the case of *ho rua*, *ho ruana* is given as meaning 'to become friends by making each other a present' or 'to give presents mutually (when formerly strangers).' Further, *ho ruanya*, the causative of *ho ruana*, is given as meaning 'to bring together in friendship those estranged' (Tom Brown et al, *Setswana-English Dictionary* [first edition 1875], 1982: 164). The reciprocity in riches is presented as one of friendship, and, moreover, as causative of friendship for those who were formerly estranged. It is a relational and prudent approach to exchange and joint participation in riches. The values and cultural history signalled by *ruana* and *ruanya*, in which the suffix of reciprocity may be applied to the having of wealth, are of both spiritual and instrumental importance for a situation in which those formerly estranged from each other and from the land in South Africa seek to find a way forward in which restitution for the dispossessed does not mean retribution for current land-owners, but a mutually-beneficial sharing of the land and its wealth.

<sup>23</sup> Duncan quotes the 'equality clause' [section 8 (2)] of the 1993 Interim Constitution as follows: 'No person shall be unfairly discriminated against, directly or indirectly, and, without derogating from the generality of this provision, on one or more of the following grounds in particular: race, gender, sex, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture or language' (1994: 67).

From a grounded perspective the linkage between land rights and relationality is rooted in the soil. The socio-legal linkage between birthright and belonging, wherein the act of birth introduces each new member of a family and a community into a reciprocal relationality of people-belonging-to-land and land-belonging-to-people, is part of a broader bond between *Modimo/Jehovah, badimo le batho* - the wide embrace of the community of life on the land. The land is a gift from God, and may belong to and be belonged to by people in the context of their relationship with God, their foreparents and their children to come. It is a theological ethic of stewardship wherein land is experienced and understood to have been received from God and the ancestors to be held in trust for future generations - a community land ethic in which relationality may be said to be prior to right. The images of womb and umbilical cord at birth, and of grave site at the time of 'becoming late' and 'passing on,' are narrative images of the rites of passage in which the soil is a metonym for place-where-we-belong. At birth a person (*motho*) is a son or daughter of the soil (*mobu*); at death a person returns to the soil ('*mobu mobung*, earth to earth') and is not alone therein. The socio-legal linkage of birthright and belonging thus participates in a holistic relationality of God, ancestors, current generations, the yet-to-be-born and the land. In connection with the mother- and-child image of the umbilical cord (*khubu*), and the custom of hiding the *khubu* at the place of birth as a surety of belonging, we might note that the word *khubu* may be used to refer to one's home when one is away - a traditional locative with healing potential, psychological and social (Mosoma 1991), for a context in which generations of violent dispossession and rural-urban migrancy have estranged people from the land and from each other.

Further, the Sotho words for 'roots' are relevant. While the word *motso* (plural *metso*) may mean root, unit, cause, origin, or an etymological root, the word *mothapo* (plural *methapo*) may mean a thin root, a vein or artery, a family or race, or the 'dark line on the stomach of a pregnant woman.'<sup>24</sup> The realisation that the same word, *methapo*, may be used to refer to roots in the soil and arteries in the human body, and in particular those surrounding the womb of a pregnant woman, presents a striking image of the flow of life between the land and its people. That *mothapo*, moreover, may be used to denote a lineage or a race broadens the scope of the *mobu-motho* linkage to include whole nations. In a comparative context, the biblical *adam* may be seen to be as much an address as a name, telling a similar story of birth and belonging rooted in the soil (*adamah*). What we may call a narrative etymology (in Sotho, Hebrew or wherever we may find it) has an important role to play in a grounded theology of

<sup>24</sup> The definitions are taken from the *Southern Sotho - English Dictionary* of A. Mabile and H. Dieterlen, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, as revised and enlarged by R.A. Paroz, Morija, Lesotho, 1961.



land and land restitution, telling us that the primary restitution to be effected is relational, between and among the soil, people and God.

### 8.1.2.2 *Suffering as a Compensable Right in Land*

One of the specific questions raised by a general linkage between right and relationality in land restitution is whether or not suffering may be said to be a right in land. Is there a justiciable link between the *memoria passionis* of individuals, families and communities and their claims for land restitution and compensation? One focus of such a debate is the property clause in the New Constitution. In a provision relating to the interpretation of 'just and equitable' compensation in cases of state expropriation of privately-held land, the clause states that *the history of acquisition of land* must be taken into account [section 25 (3) (b)]. This provision may be taken as a possible point of entry for an argument that seeks to establish suffering as a right in land. A second focus is the Restitution of Land Rights Act, the moral subtext of which, indeed the very existence of which, would seem to lend legitimacy to a suffering-as-right-in-land argument. In particular, section 33 of the Act, which deals with factors to be taken into account by the Land Court when considering its decisions, states that the Court shall have regard to the following factors *inter alia*:

- a) the desirability of providing for restitution of rights in land or compensation to people who were dispossessed of their rights in land as a result of or in pursuance of racially based discriminatory laws;
- b) the desirability of remedying past violations of human rights;
- c) the requirements of equity and justice;
- d) the desirability of avoiding major social disruption [section 33 (a - d)].

Upon what, we may ask, are the 'desirability' provisions based? In what do they consist? In the first two provisions the desirability of restitution, compensation and remedy may be said to be directly related to the suffering of dispossessive legislation and the violation of human rights. While the words 'black' and 'white' have been almost excised from 'politically correct' public discourse in South Africa in the transition period, it is necessary to state clearly that the human rights violated were *black* human rights, and that the land and life lost as a result of racially-based discriminatory laws and practice was *black* land and life. That the discrimination is specifically designated as being 'racially-based' supports an argument for suffering as a right in land, or at the very least for suffering as being relevant for the assertion of rights in land. When viewed from the perspective of those who have been made to suffer, the 'racially-based' nature of the discrimination places black claims for restitution in a different



category from white claims for restitution - of which there has been a surprisingly high number.<sup>25</sup> While white claimants may be able to show that they lost land as a result of a racially-based discriminatory law (e.g. white farmers expropriated in pursuance of the establishment or enlargement of one of the black 'homelands'), they can hardly show that they themselves were discriminated against on the basis of their race, which they are required to do in any morally defensible interpretation of section 8 (3) of the 1993 Interim Constitution.<sup>26</sup> This point goes to the heart of the motivation for a Restitution Act that seeks to legislate material redress for South Africans who *suffered* dispossession as a result of racially-based legislation and practice. The *memoria passionis* of claimant individuals, families and communities, narrating personal psychological, spiritual, social and physical suffering and material loss, not only may but *must* be considered in assessing the merits of restitution claims if the Restitution Act is to achieve, and be seen by black South Africans to achieve, its moral and material aims. From a grounded perspective such suffering is seen to be compensable right in land.

The third provision quoted above, 'the requirements of equity and justice,' loses in its ambiguity what it gains in its generality. We must first note that the provision speaks of equity and not equality, in keeping with the 'just and equitable' language used with respect to expropriation and compensation in the Interim and New Constitutions. Current land-owners have seen their equity in land as something they may use or resist restitution claims and/or to gain leverage in negotiations for 'just and equitable' compensation - regardless of the fact that their equity is to a significant extent the result of state subsidies and soft loans, and offset in many cases by their debt load. Given the close relationship between registered rights in land (e.g. title deeds) and receipts (see the argument of Petrus Makhubedu in chapter two) in a

<sup>25</sup> A case memorable for its symbolic value involves that of a white claimant for the farm Albatross, formerly part of the Gazankulu homeland near Kruger National Park in the Northern Province Lowveld. *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 8<sup>th</sup> edition, gives the following as one of its definitions for 'albatross': 'a source of frustration or guilt; an encumbrance' (Oxford 1990: 26).

<sup>26</sup> Section 8 of the Interim Constitution is entitled 'Equality', as is found in chapter three, 'Fundamental Rights.' The 'equality clause,' section 8 (2), has been quoted already in footnote 22 above. Section 8 (3) reads as follows: '(a) This section shall not preclude measures designed to achieve the adequate protection and advancement of persons or groups or categories of persons disadvantaged by unfair discrimination, in order to enable their full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms; (b) every person or community dispossessed of rights in land before the commencement of this Constitution under any law which would have been inconsistent with subsection (2) had that subsection been in operation at the time of the dispossession, shall be entitled to claim restitution of such rights subject to and in accordance with sections 121, 122, and 123.' Sections 121, 122 and 123 appear under the heading 'Restitution of Land Rights' and call for an Act in Parliament to 'provide for matters relating to the restitution of land rights, including the establishment of a Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights and a Land Court. The Act was duly drafted, presented, passed by Parliament and signed into law as the Restitution of Land Rights Act (No. 22 of 1994). Durkje Gilfillan has argued that white claimants may have a valid claim with respect to the loss of rights in land, but that this claim may not be construed as a *restitution* claim in terms of the Interim Constitution and the Restitution Act.

market in land as commodity, a grounded analysis will want to ask what, beyond exerting a downward pressure on calculations of equity, outstanding long-term debt does to the security of registered rights in land. Black farmers will look to their historical equity in the land, and may seek to argue that their suffering of dispossession is a compensable equity within the relational integrality of land and people.

With respect to justice, conceptions of justice vary notoriously from retributive to, among others, distributive (Rawls 1971), commutative (Nozick 1974), and restorative (Tutu 1996). The conclusion of Karen Lebacqz in *Six Theories of Justice* that an examination of types of *injustice* may be a more useful way forward for a theory of justice is important for a suffering-as-right-in-land argument. Following Joel Feinburg in his advocacy of a classification of types of injustice as a more promising avenue for theoretical insights than that of the traditional classifications of retributive, distributive and commutative, Lebacqz asserts that 'a theory of justice is needed that is truly historical and that takes seriously the problem of the rectification of injustice' (1986: 123). Taking injustice (and its legacy) as a starting point for a theory and practice of justice may be seen from a grounded point of view to be directly relevant for the interpretation and application of the constitutional provision that the history of acquisition of land must be taken into account in consideration of expropriation and compensation for purposes of land restitution and redistribution. Approached from the perspective of those who have suffered dispossession, the 'justice' of section 33 (c) of the Restitution Act may not be determined apart from the *memoria passionis* of claimant individuals, families and communities. Further, in an Act that seeks to gain material redress for losses (of land, life and quality of life) suffered, it may be argued that the voices of the dispossessed must be given priority over those who enjoyed discursive power throughout the decades of dispossession under apartheid.

The same point holds with respect to the fourth provision quoted, 'the desirability of avoiding major social disruption.' While on the one hand this very necessary provision seeks to control the propensity to violence (rhetorical and physical) of certain sectors of the current landowning class, on the other hand it seeks to quell the impulse to re-occupation/land invasion on the part of land-less rural and urban communities and associations. The provision asserts that the requirements of law and order must be upheld in the restitution process. From a grounded perspective, it is necessary to observe that the requirements of law and order tend to uphold the *status quo* and thus function in support of current landowners. If restitution is to be effected without the 'major social disruption' that characterised the dispossession, the official process of claiming land through the CRLR and the Land Court must be one which shows

concrete results on a time line that precludes the re-occupation of ancestral land by claimant communities who continue to suffer the multivalent deprivation of dispossession (see Batloun case above). Should the already-but-not-yet of the transition stretch on in human time to the point where the older members of claimant communities die before being able to return to the land of their foreparents, it will be difficult indeed to stop, and to justify efforts to stop, what the communities will call re-occupations and current landowners and the state will regard as land invasions. In this light, section 33 (d) may be seen as a major motivation for a more transparent and efficient processing of land claims by the CRLR, which will in turn require an increased allocation of financial and human resources.

The debate on suffering as a compensable right in land as a particular case of the linkage between right and relationality in land restitution claims may be said to have moved us beyond considerations of legal justice. As is the case with respect to reconciliation and national healing in general, the challenge of land restitution and redistribution requires more of South Africans than that which may be legislated or programmed. The relational integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution tells us that only a holistic approach that addresses the spiritual as well as the material aspects of restitution will succeed. Traditional theological considerations of confession, repentance, and forgiveness, grace, love and compassion, comprising a relational praxis of salvation, are as relevant for life on the land as are political considerations of liberation and democracy and legal considerations of remedy. Far from needing a debate concerning their relative merits, however, we need a debate which explores the space in which the spiritual, political and legal intersect, and how the spiritual aspects of restitution may be facilitated in the public sphere. In an interview entitled 'The Ultimate Test of Faith,' Desmond Tutu, in his capacity as Chairperson of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, makes the point with characteristic vigour, 'It's realpolitik, this forgiveness thing. It's not just something in the realm of religion or the spiritual. If justice is your last word you've had it. You've got to go beyond it' (Tutu 1996: 12). Mark Gevisser, the interviewer, makes the useful observation that, "'Beyond justice" is a particularly Tutuesque combination of Christian faith - "which is ultimately a faith of grace" - and African communalism.' Elaborating on the latter, Tutu says

Ubuntu says I am human only because you are human. If I undermine your humanity I dehumanise myself. You must do what you can to maintain this great harmony, which is perpetually undermined by resentment, anger, desire for vengeance. That's why African jurisprudence is restorative rather than retributive (1996: 12).

Justice is relational, and must thus be grounded in a conceptual soil that breathes human narrative. We may note, with reference to preceding discussions of the linkage between *borapedi* and praxis in local struggles for land restitution, the inter-traditionality of Tutu's 'beyond justice' - an interaction of Christian grace and African *ubuntu*. For reconciliation and restitution to be more than 'big terms used by politicians that cannot be implemented' we must enter into an inter-personal, inter-community and inter-traditional realm 'beyond justice,' where the spirituality of grace and *ubuntu* is an essential aspect of a realpolitik wherein justice must not be allowed to be the final word. Taking as our point of entry the manifestation and suffering of *injustice*, such an entrance will confront us with a call to compassion, a willingness to suffer with each other towards a shared praxis of *mayibuye iAfrika*. A theology of land restitution grounded in the discourse and praxis of rural land-less communities presents us with a God who has sacrificed for us and calls us to a discipleship of sacrifice for others (Ephraim Pooe, Mogopa; William Kgalane, Leroro), a God of compassion who, together with the ancestors, 'feels our pain' and calls us to feel the pain of others (Cyprian Ramosime, Bakubung), a God who acts to liberate the oppressed (Dikeledi Mashego, Leroro), a God who 'loves love' and calls people to love and not to make each other suffer (Emilia Sedibe, Leroro), a *theologia crucis* that experiences the cross of Christ as a nexus of suffering and forgiveness (Maria Sephakwe, Barolong), and an 'ubuntu which is true Christianity' (Patience Pashe, Alexandra). Tutu's 'beyond justice' recalls Niebuhr's 'justice that is only justice is less than justice,' though Tutu may be said to be more optimistic than Niebuhr with respect to the extent to which we may go beyond justice to love in the public sphere. In this connection we may also recall that Emilia Sedibe's very eloquent exhortation to an ethic of love beyond justice was given realistic support later by her friend Hildah Makogane who, at the conclusion of her interpretation of the encounter between Jesus and Zacchaeus which led to restitution, declared with a seasoned faith, 'I'm praying for peace, for truth and for love. Because it has been long that we are fighting for this love and peace, but it is invisible. It has not appeared.'<sup>27</sup>

May we reasonably expect to see an embrace of justice and love in the public sphere? With respect to restitution and reconciliation a possible way forward has been pointed by an emerging discourse on empathy. Durkje Gilfillan, in the concluding sentence of her master's thesis, raises the issue of empathy with respect to land restitution, calling for a system of land rights able to 'empathise particularly with the matter of the internalisation of social costs' (1995a: 37). A system of land rights that includes inherently the social and

<sup>27</sup> Hildah Makogane, Leroro Interview, 21 May 1994, p.20. See the discussion in chapter six under the heading, 'Leroro: Affirming the End of the Old: "the holy scriptures are taking place".'



ecological costs and responsibilities of rights in land may well be said to empathise with the goals of land restitution. However, a system of land rights empathising with 'the internalisation of social costs' is not the same as people empathising with each other. It lacks an appreciation of the inter-personal and inter-community relationality of empathy between current and former landholders - the cost of which to current landholders has proved to be more than they are willing to bear, or even to contemplate in most cases, to date. That the redress of injustice, relational in nature and dynamic, will not be possible without an empathy and compassion 'beyond justice' may be said to present a grounded theology of land restitution with its greatest challenge in the public sphere. In response, the prophetic pragmatism of rural land-less communities, linking *borapedi* and praxis, endeavours to break through the relational barriers of the past, seeking not a retributive but a critically inclusive and reciprocal restitution of land and people to each other.

Donald Shriver, in his ground-breaking *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, examines the possibility of empathy in the public sphere in the context of a discussion entitled 'Remembering History Morally.' Distinguishing between first-hand and second-hand experiences of the suffering of evil, Shriver argues for the priority of the voice of those who have suffered first-hand in any effort to redress past wrong and (re)create community:

Can we truly empathise with each others' suffering? For the sake of achieving political community after its fracture we must hope so. But the tension between first- and second-hand experience of evil cannot be dissolved, and the firsthand sufferers are the first to insist on the difference (1996: 69).

Shriver's distinction between first- and second-hand sufferers of systemic evil resonates well with the emphasis in a grounded theology on the voices of those who are said by perpetrators and many second-hand sufferers to be 'voiceless'. The voice of the Batlounge, reaching from their graveyard to the offices of the Minister of Land Affairs and the Chief Land Claims Commissioner, is a case in point. While it has been heard in Pretoria, however, the more relevant question in a grounded analysis is: has the voice of the Batlounge been heard in Putfontein? What possibility exists for a mutual hearing between the Batlounge and the white farmers who have recently lost their compensation suit against the government? That the Batlounge enjoy 'good relations' with the white farmer on whose land their graveyard is to be found is the result of a pragmatic approach that has the potential to be more than merely pragmatic on the part of both. In the event the voice from the ground proclaims not a counter-exclusionary regime of landowning but a socio-legal linkage between birthright and the

reciprocal relationality of belonging - a linkage battered but not broken by the violence of forced removal and relocation, and renewable upon the return of land and people to each other. The nexus of right and relationality in a grounded theology of land restitution may thus be seen to be not only the land, but the land as a locus of suffering, death and resurrection of the community of life of *Modimo/Jehovah, badimo le batho*, in which community God is the God of all and calls all to an transformative ethic of *com passionis* beyond (but not apart from) justice.

'Can we truly empathise with each others' suffering?' Shriver's answer, that for the sake of forging political community after brokenness 'we must hope so,' returns us to the tension between potentiality and contingency in the subjunctive that is the transition. The future of South Africa, land and people, continues to hang in the balance; it will be decided in places like Putfontein as much as it will be decided in Parliament and Pretoria.

## **8.2 Implications for Internal Challenges Facing the Communities**

Of the many internal challenges facing rural communities as they return to their ancestral land, two challenges in particular deserve our attention: 1) the challenge to unite: to heal brokenness and overcome mistrust following decades of division, and 2) the gender challenge: to be liberated from patriarchy and to transform the regime of male and female on the land in response to the emergent praxis of *womandla*. Each of these challenges bears directly on the communities' prospects for and programmes of reconstruction and development, and each participates in and is addressed by the relational integrality of a grounded theology of land restitution.

### **8.2.1 The Challenge to Unite**

As noted at various points throughout the thesis, the forced removals of rural black communities from their ancestral land were as divisive as they were dispossessive. Centuries of tradition-eviscerating legislation and decades of the co-optation and corruption of traditional leaders, together with rivalries that arose with respect to community leadership during the years spent in internal exile in state-manipulated resettlement areas, have resulted in a widespread call for unity and an uncompromising demand for democratic, accountable local leadership and government in rural communities. The legacy of internal division left by the forced removals means that all communities claiming restitution face the challenge of restoring or creating unity as they prepare to return to their ancestral lands. At this point we do well to

recall the question asked above: what potential for internal healing, trust-building and unity is occasioned by a return to ancestral land, and how is that potential to be realised?

The challenge is seen to be an urgent one within the communities themselves. While a series of Bills have been introduced in Parliament since 1994 to help communities deal with the challenges of returning to their land (e.g. the Communal Property Associations Bill), the intangibles of trust and unity demand a hermeneutics that not only conjoins the religio-cultural with the historical-legal, socio-economic and political, but that does so in a way able to access the inter-traditional spiritual roots of healing in the communities.

Let us take the example of the Barolong ba Matlwang, who, having returned to their land in April 1995 from different points of internal exile (e.g. Rooigrond and Ikageng), continue to experience internal division at Matlwang. Not unsurprisingly, they associate their lack of progress with respect to the reconstruction and development of Matlwang with their lack of internal unity. At a meeting between the community and the Land and Covenant Committee of the SACC in Matlwang on 24 September 1996, which brought together community members with different and conflicting allegiances, the matter of unity was raised in impassioned terms and became the subject of a searching theological reflection that emphasised the covenant of the Barolong with themselves, their ancestors, their friends and God. Mr R.J. Ntsimane was the first to make reference to the need for unity, and did so in the context of an inter-traditional witness to the role of God and the ancestors in the return of the Barolong to Matlwang:

Yes we have always prayed. Our partners have always urged us to pray [to] God, to gain help to come back to Matlwang. I can say it went very slowly! Dr Kistner told us years ago that everything happens in its own time. We did not give up. We trusted. And today we are back! Today we must thank God (*Modimo*) and our ancestors (*badimo*). We must thank them! So our gates will be open and our needs met. And so that we will be united!

Ntsimane's call to thank *Modimo* and the *badimo* 'so that our gates may be open and our needs met, and so that we will be united' could well serve as a prayer for all returning communities. The image of open gates is a beautiful and inviting symbol of the restitution of land and people, and also signals a welcome (*kamohelo*) to others that contrasts sharply with an exclusionary conceptualisation and regime of land ownership. The culture of *kamohelo* has a practical dimension, in that an open gate allows friendships and alliances (covenants) to be formed, with relevance for the meeting of community needs. Further, the role of God and the ancestors in the community continues after the return to land - not least with respect to the need for unity within the community. It is in remembering and thanking God and the ancestors for their role in bringing the Barolong from their different places of exile to Matlwang that the

community will be able to achieve unity. As Rev. J.N. Gabaotsho had said, speaking before Mr Ntsimane, 'Anything we attempt apart from God will fail. We must invite God into all of our affairs.' Mr L. Lerefolo then addressed the meeting, again placing the call for unity in the context of the covenant relationship between and among the Barolong, their *badimo* and *Modimo*, but including also the warning that land regained could be land re-lost if the community failed to unite:

I know not everyone is happy. Some still have doubts. But today's meeting is to talk of our covenant between ourselves, our ancestral spirits and Modimo. I recall having to request *permission* to visit our ancestral graveyard. We had to get a permit. If you did not get that permit you were arrested for trespassing! So the graves were very important. Now, today we began in the graveyard. That reminded me of the former times.

Today we are talking about love. Good people you must unite! Otherwise other people will take your land away - because you cannot cultivate it. We must unite! ... If you want people to do things for you, you must do things for yourself! God helps those who help themselves. I know that the ancestors will give Morris strength to lead and teach us. We must support him. Respect him and support our leader.

Lerefolo raises the issue of love in the public sphere from *within* his community, linking the relational and the practical in a call to unite and cultivate the soil. Waiting for others, for example covenant partners overseas, could result in another dispossession. Ongoing division was retarding the re-establishment of the life of the Barolong at Matlwang. Mr Z. Phakedi, in a speech remarkable for its fluid inter-traditionality, then called for a spiritual cleansing and conversion of all those, white and black, who had broken faith with God and with their fellow South Africans. It is a constructive call to restore a broken faith and broken relationships, and to begin to 'build each other up':

In this land of South Africa, throughout South Africa, there was a break in faith between people. There were things that were done that broke their relationship with Jesus Christ. We always prayed. We ourselves kept faith. I thank our *badimo*. We always had the belief that our ancestors, who heard our prayers, would make our prayers to be heard on high so that we could return to this our land at Matlwang.

Those who have things in their hearts that are not good they must take them out! We must build each other up!

In response, Morris Gorekwang, Chairperson of Barolong Head Council and well supported by those in attendance (the chief was absent), cited a Tswana proverb as part of his practical motivation for the Barolong to unite: '*kgobo kgobo e a ikgobokanyetsa*.' Loosely translated it means that if you want to develop or build something you must keep everything and everyone together for it to work. Rev Tom Mosala of the North-Western Province Regional Council of Churches, facilitator and translator for the meeting, then added his plea, 'Let us be united so that our development may begin, and be carried forward with success.'



*From a grounded perspective part of the answer to the challenge of restoring unity may be seen to lie in the affirmation of the wider community of land, God and people. It is in belonging to and participating in the inclusive community of God, the ancestors and children to come that current generations may find a way to return to each other and build viable productive communities on the land.*<sup>28</sup>

### 8.2.2 The Gender Challenge

The call to unity will and should fail as long as it continues to be a call issued by men to other men. It *will* fail because an androcentric perspective on the call to unity is reductive to the point of excluding from that unity more than half of the population of rural communities, and it *should* fail because the unity in question involves a relational ethic inclusive of the wide embrace of land, God and past, present and future generations, male and female. It is not (co)incidental that the linkage between right and relationality with respect to the land is presented in female images (mother, womb, umbilical cord). It is a *birthright*. It is the mother who gives birth, and without her all talk of birthright and belonging is irrelevant. That *birthright* and belonging lie at the centre of land restitution claims should tell all concerned that the mothers have not only an equal right but a preferential right to claim. Further, the mothers give birth in pain, a pain that is, contra an androcentric perspective, not peripheral but central to life on the land. *Mma ngwana o tshwara thipa ka bohale*, and without that willingness to endure pain on the part of the mothers there would be no giving of birth, no nurturing of life.

I have argued above that the brokenness of the community of male and female on the land is related to the estrangement of male and female from the land, threatening a loss of *ubuntu-botho*. A grounded theology of land restitution recognises the need for a holistic restitution of the community of *Modimo, badimo le batho*, male and female. The future of the people on the land, spoken of in human terms as children and childrens' children, will not happen apart from such a holistic restitution. To recall the conclusion of chapter seven, the transformative relationality of women's *hermeneutics*, social and biblical, seeks to heal the brokenness of male and female in an inclusive community of equality and reciprocity. The hermeneutical dimension of women's struggle for land rights interacts with the practical dimension of women as farmers and providers for the children to whom they give birth. Thus a grounded praxis of *mayibuye iAfrika* must be a praxis that celebrates and facilitates

<sup>28</sup> With respect to the phrase 'to return to each other': the Sotho word used to translate 'reconciliation' is the noun *poelano*, which is itself taken from the verb *ho boelana*, to return to each other (*ho boela*, to return to, plus *ana*, the suffix of mutuality or reciprocity).

*womandla!* for the sake of men as well as of women, involving the transformation of both the consciousness and structures of patriarchy on the land. The ongoing violence of men against women and young girls in South Africa, and throughout the world, is a violence against the relational integrality of life, against *ubuntu-botho*, and threatens to subvert any meaningful participation in the restitution of land and people, and to rupture irrevocably in its rape the relational ground of birthright and belonging.

### 8.3 Implications for the Discipline of Theological Ethics

The grounding of a theological ethics of land restitution in the discourse and praxis of rural land-less communities has richly rewarded the initial commitment of the research to local voices in local languages in the first person singular and plural. Theology is too important to be left to professional theologians. At the same time, a grounded approach to theological ethics employing qualitative research methods has much to offer with respect to the collaboration of professional, pastoral and lay theologians and ethicists. Theology is a relational discipline. The theological hearings highlighted the creative and critical potential of the relationality of doing theology together. The linkage between *borapedi* and praxis in a grounded theology of land restitution, the inter-traditionality of that *borapedi*, the participatory relationality of the hermeneutical dimension of that praxis and the prophetic pragmatism of the practical dimension of that praxis are some of the findings of a grounded approach to method in theological ethics. In what follows further directions for collaborative explorations are indicated.

In an article entitled, 'Reconstructing Theology: A Woman's Perspective,' Libuseng Lebaka-Ketshabile argues that in each generation theology must be reconstructed, and that there is a particular need for 'a constant reconstruction of theology' from the perspective of an African woman. From a woman's perspective the reconstructions of theology to date suffer from the limitation 'that professional theologians and intellectuals tend to believe that they can do theological reconstruction without the majority of people who have not studied theology but who have lived and still live out their theology' (1995: 44). Her argument recalls Archbishop Ngada's statement quoted at the beginning of the thesis: 'If you could take the people from the ground there ... and give them a chance to say things the way they know them and the way they understand them, to give their experiences, you would be surprised!' Lebaka-Ketshabile, in a surprise of her own, follows her critique of academic theology with a participatory approach to Anselm's *fides quaerens intellectum*:

Academics should stop thinking that theology starts with them. For me theology does not

start in the classroom; it does not start in the library. It starts when *faith questions* its own existence, when *faith wants to understand* the nature and aim of the One who is its subject. Theology starts when *one wants to understand* the reason for one's being and how one should live in accordance with the expectations of the Supreme being, using St Anselm's concept of what theology is (1995:44, italics mine).

Lebaka-Ketshabile's participatory approach to the *quaerens* of theology, and her shift from 'theology starts when *faith* wants to understand' to 'theology starts when *one* wants to understand' is very much in harmony with a grounded approach to theology, in which the emphasis is very much on the verb and its personal subject. In a grounded approach it is not an abstract faith (or hope or love) seeking understanding but faith in the first person singular and plural. In sentences like *fides quaerens intellectum*, *spes quaerens intellectum* (Moltmann 1964: 33) and *amor quaerens intellectum* it is necessary to insist that the *fides*, *spes* and *amor* are the faith, hope and love of a person and/or a community. That is, the subject of the *quaerens* of theology is personal: the faith of Mofokeng *quaerens*, the hope of Kgalane *quaerens*, the love of Sedibe *quaerens*, and so on.

Voices in the first person speak their own language(s), and the importance of language, translation and linguistico-cultural interpretation in a grounded theology has been discussed at several points throughout the thesis. Further research is necessary concerning the question of the influence of language on the theological discourse of which it is a medium. As noted above, the way we think, theologically and otherwise, is strongly related to the language(s) in which we think: their (narrative) etymologies, grammars, genders, and idioms both enable and place limits upon the articulative dynamics of making explicit that which is implicit in our faith experience. For example, we may well ask to what extent the inter-traditionality of the *borapedi* of rural land-less communities in South Africa may be influenced by the intercultural dynamics of different languages in the collective mind of communities able to think and articulate in more than one language. As noted in chapter three, the multi-lingual faculty of black South Africans affects greatly the creative and critical aspects of their theological thought, multiplying the options for theological exploration and expression.

There is a second sense in which language and translation/interpretation is important in a grounded theological ethics of land restitution. In a sense that conjoins the political with the religio-cultural, communities claiming land restitution are forced in the event to translate the multivalent integrality of their approach to land, whose proper medium is their own first language, into answers to a series of questions in English in the Land Claim Form, whose proper medium is what we might call a professional legal dialect of English. In addition to Peter Ntshwe's criticism that the land claim forms demand too much information, 'an

interrogation,' is the problem of the political implications of religio-cultural translation in the restitution process. The answers of the Sekwai Mapulana are a case in point. In response to question seven, 'Other evidence to substantiate your claim,' the Sekwai state: 'Our graves are still there. Historically we fought with the Swazis at the same place, Moholoholo. Our four fathers (*sic*) have named most of the farms and mountains. We lived there before the whites came to South Africa.' When the form asks, at number nine, for 'any other information you would like to bring to the Commission's attention,' the Sekwai reply, 'That our title deeds are our forefathers (*sic*) graves, because we did not bought (*sic*) the land from humanbeing (*sic*) the land was given to us by God, example was that God gave power to us to defeat the Swazi warios (*sic*). The land was given to those who settled there first' (Sekwai Land Claim Form, CRLR, Pretoria). The Land Commission and Court will have to rule on the extent to which the graves of the ancestors are justiciable as title deeds and on the relative evidentiary merit of the naming of farms and mountains on the one hand and registered rights in land on the other. In calling attention to the importance of language and lingistico-cultural translation in the formal restitution process the thesis urges that the Commission follow a grounded approach to researching claims lodged with it, and that the Court open itself to a grounded hermeneutics that conjoins the historical, legal and religio-cultural in ways that challenge legal hermeneutics as they have been practised in common law up to the passage of the Restitution in Land Rights Act in 1994.

In the exploration of the implications of the thesis for the discipline of theological ethics it is important to recognise that we are hereby reversing the usual direction of the consideration of implication and relevance. While the (largely inherent) implications of a grounded theology of *mayibuye iAfrika* for the restitution of land have been considered above, it is also necessary to explore the significance of land restitution struggles for theology. E.M Conradie, in an article entitled, 'The Significance of the Land Issue in South Africa for Christian Theology' argues that *land is a hermeneutical key* for theological reflection in the South African context. 'If land becomes a dominant theme in any specific context (e.g. South Africa), "land" may in such contexts be taken into consideration as being one possible adequate hermeneutical key for analysing the South African context *as a whole* as well as being a clue to discover the meaning of the bible *as a whole*' (Conradie 1992: 2, emphasis as in original). Conradie employs land as a hermeneutical key in the analysis of both the contemporary South African context and the biblical text, and concludes that 'land' may be seen as a hermeneutical link between the two, challenging traditional notions of, for example, soteriology. Following an analysis of the struggles for land of dispossessed South Africans



(including a treatment of the multivalent significance of land in the lives of black South Africans, quoting the statement of Petros Nkosi quoted at the beginning of this thesis) and of 'land' as a hermeneutical key in the interpretation of the bible, he argues that 'the existing soteriological concepts could and should be challenged by the notion of God's gift of land to the land-less and the (re) establishment of a true home for those inhabiting this land' (1992: 13).<sup>29</sup> In so doing Conradie seek to counter the abstraction of the traditional notions by 'reinterpreting classic theological concepts (like faith and works, grace and sin, law and gospel, creation and new creation, genesis and eschatology) through the (more concrete?) lens of the notion of "land"' (:14).

Conradie need not have stopped at soteriology. Recalling Mazamisa, we may ask about the implications of a grounded approach to land for beliefs about God and the incarnation. An experience and view of land as a medium of divine presence (as the *ubuntu*fication of God) and as medium of the community of past, present and future generations with God supports the argument that restitution is relational and that the primary reunion in returns to ancestral land is between and among *Modimo, badimo, batho le bana ba ka hlahang* (children to come). With respect to Christology, we have been (re)introduced to Jesus as refugee in Africa, as man of prayer in Gethsemane and as suffering saviour on the cross, a composite of struggle and compassion born of the conjoining of the *memoria passionis* of the cross and of rural land-less communities. At the same time, there has been a conjoining of the *memoria resurrectionis* of Jesus and rural communities that have returned to their land. In places like Molotstad, where the return to land of the Bakubung was experienced as a resurrection of the community (ancestors and current generations), a narrative life is imparted to Kuschel's chiasmus: a *theologia crucis* may not be done apart from a *theologia resurrectionis*, nor a *theologia resurrectionis* from a *theologia crucis*. If, as I argued in chapter six, *Mayibuye iAfrika!* bears within itself a knowledge of the cross, it also bears within itself a transformative sense of resurrection on the land. Recalling Takatso Mofokeng's work,

<sup>29</sup> In place of the 'classic theories' of redemption, atonement and exemplary life, and beyond the challenge of liberation theology, Conradie would have us consider 'land for the land-less': 'I would like to suggest that all these soteriological concepts could and should also be challenged by one in which God's work of salvation is concretely described as the promise and the gracious gift of land to the land-less, of homes to the homeless, of a harbour for the harbourless. God's gifts to humankind also include a code of conduct for the management of the granted land so that the inhabited land can become a true home where the *shalom* between God, human beings, the other animals and the environment may prosper. God's dealings with humankind, however, also include again and again the wrath of God on the mismanagement of the land, the expulsion of God's people from the granted land, the longing for someone who will rule the land with justice, the coming near of such a kingdom in the person and ministry of Jesus, the failure of Jesus' proposed social order in his death on the cross, the sign from God through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and through the coming of the Spirit of Christ at Pentecost, that death and destruction do not have the final word, and in the eschatological expectancy of the new earth, a land where God's presence will ensure the longed for *shalom* (1992: 14).

a grounded theology of land looks for and witnesses to the resurrection of the crucified among the crossbearers 'in their own time.'

Perhaps the most striking incidence of the grounding of theology in the land, contra the abstraction of theology in the heavens, comes with respect to beliefs about healing and reconciliation. Traditional beliefs and practices concerning healing are very close to the land, and feature the land as provider of healing for people, before ever people can be considered as healers of the land. Responding to a question concerning the rights in land it enjoyed before its dispossession, the Mashilane Community included the gathering of herbs and traditional medicines. Mr. Harry Makisha Makofana, for example, spoke of the life of his parents at Mapalagele, Buffelsfontein 452 KT, before they were evicted in 1968. The theology of healing is implicit in his memory of the herbs that 'anyone could gather' from God's land:

And there were herbs. Medicinal herbs. On the mountains. *Monaka*. *Phela*. *Senokwane*. *Nkekoloji*. *Lewane*. *Magaba*. *Monaka* was for the blood. It cleansed the blood and washed the intestines. Like an SS tablet. *Phela* was like Eno. You took it for acidic stomach, to settle the stomach. *Senokwane* was for the tongue and the tonsils. *Nkekoloji* was for a chest cold, like a decongestant. *Lewane* was taken when the heart was pounding heavily, to settle down the heart. It was also good for headaches. *Magaba* was taken when you were looking after the cattle on the mountain or any time you were hungry - you just ate it. Anyone could search for these herbs. It was free for everyone.<sup>30</sup>

A grounded theological ethics of land restitution sees in Makofana's narrative of gathering herbs on the mountainside a right in land of which his parents and community were dispossessed. The discipline of theological ethics is called to a more intimate relation with the land and its people, to a relational participation in the *borapedi* and a collaborative participation in the praxis of communities whose suffering, struggle and celebration has much to teach those whose liberation and transformation discourse does not quite reach the ground.

#### 8.4 Implications for the Praxis of the Churches

The implications of the thesis for the praxis of the churches fall into two related categories: 1) the challenge to the churches to support the struggles for land restitution of landless individuals, families and communities, including the struggle of women for equality of land rights, and 2) the challenge to the churches with respect to the stewardship of their own land. Before these challenges may be considered, however, the thesis raises a more basic question with respect to church and land: with what understanding of 'church' are we approaching the issue of church and land?

<sup>30</sup> Harry Makofana in oral evidence to the CRLR research team, Matibidi, Blydepoort, Mpumalanga, 16 July 1996, pp.5-6, unpublished.

First, to ask, 'What is the church?' in the context of a grounded theology of land restitution is already to have asked a misleading question. The church is a 'who question'; it is relational in being and mission. The church is its people in relationship with God, each other and the creation before it is an institution or system of dogma. Faith is a verb whose subject is the believer within the community of believers before it is a substantive with propositional definition. Thus, when we ask a question like, 'What is the church doing to support rural land-less communities?' we must ask knowing that the church and rural land-less communities are not mutually-exclusive categories of people; on the contrary, there is a large overlap in membership between them. The same may be said, *a fortiori*, of the church and rural women. Second, the research has shown that the churches closest to the struggles of rural land-less communities are, with some notable exceptions, African Indigenous Churches. As Bishop Makhubu has observed, the poor, indeed the 'poorest of the poor,' comprise the membership of *Dikereke tsa Moea*, the Spiritual and Indigenous churches: their suffering, struggle and celebration are intimately known to them, as are their traditional beliefs and practices with respect to ancestors and the land (Makhubu 1988: 68). Third, there is thus a distinction to be drawn between churches that have land, buildings and other possessions, the provenance and stewardship of which they may be called to account for, and those churches that do not. The churches of the land-less poor, insofar as 'churches' may be abstracted from the community of believers and God, are as often trees and fields as they are formal structures. Further, part of this distinction is to be found in an underlying difference in conceptualisations and spiritualities of land and land ownership. One of the clearest implications of the thesis for what we may call landed churches is that of the theological-ethical distinction between stewardship and ownership of land and other resources. The process of registering churches with successive colonial and apartheid governments operated with a strong bias in favour of western, white-led, landed churches at the expense of African, land-less churches, re-enforcing the landed state of the former and the land-less state of the latter.<sup>31</sup> When the question of the church, the land and the land-less is raised, therefore, we must know of whom we speak in each case.

It may well be asked what the landed churches are doing in the post-election stage of the transition to support the struggles of land-less South Africans (of their own, another or no church). To date, those who are most obviously in solidarity with rural land-less communities

<sup>31</sup> See the argument in Makhubu (1988). One of the key texts in support of the argument of the African Indigenous Churches that they were discriminated against throughout their history by both a white church and a white state is the report of the Tomlinson Commission in 1955, in which the clergy of mainline churches are seen as cultural agents of apartheid. See the *Summary of the Report of the Government Commission for the Socio-Economic Development of the Bantu Areas within the Union of South Africa*, Pretoria, 1955.



are other rural land-less communities. As the Sotho proverb says, '*Mafutsana a llelana*,' it is the poor who help each other. The manifest commitment of the landed churches to a critical engagement with power in the new South Africa is in most cases not being balanced by a manifest commitment to the poor themselves at the local level. The solidarity of the landed churches, where it does exist, is more with the issue of land restitution than with actual communities claiming the restitution of their ancestral land. There is a crying need for an integration of the practical and theoretical dimensions of solidarity, uniting the pastoral and prophetic ministries of the church with people on the ground.

A series of fine resolutions, denominational and ecumenical, concerning church and land in the transition period have not been followed up. Perhaps the most representative of these resolutions is that taken at the Rustenburg Conference of Church Leaders in November 1990 - the most inclusive conference of church leaders in South Africa since Cottesloe in 1960. Taken together, the affirmation and resolution on restitution may be seen to articulate a preferential option for the land-less poor on the part of a church struggling with its historical complicity in the dispossession and impoverishment of black South Africans:

**We affirm and highlight the following:**

The Bible reveals God as a God of compassionate love who has a special care for the sinner, the downtrodden, the poor and all who suffer injustice. Obedience to Christ therefore requires that we develop an economic system based on justice, compassion and co-responsibility, so that those in need benefit more than those who have more than they need. More equitable wealth distribution must go hand in hand with economic growth.

After decades of oppression, the removal of discriminatory laws will have to be accompanied by affirmative acts of restitution in the fields of health care, psychological healing, education, housing, employment, economic infrastructure, and especially land ownership. For many years greed has led to the taking of land from the poor and weak. Both Church and State must address the issue of restoring land to dispossessed people.

**Restitution and a Commitment to Action**

Confession and forgiveness necessarily require restitution. Without it, a confession of guilt is incomplete.

As a first step towards restitution, the Church must examine its land ownership and work for the return of all land expropriated from relocated communities to its original owners.<sup>32</sup>

The clause (5.1) 'Confession and forgiveness necessarily require restitution. Without it a confession of guilt is incomplete,' may be said to assert both a theological-ethical imperative that links confession and restitution, and a practical standard by which the inter-personal and inter-community relationality of justice of may be measured. That a confession of guilt is

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<sup>32</sup> *The Rustenburg Declaration*, Affirmation and Resolution on Restitution, reproduced in Conradie, de Villiers and Kinghorn, eds., *Church and Land*, Stellebosch, 1992, section B.7.



'incomplete' without restitution is a painfully relevant understatement of the dynamics of land restitution in the transition period to date, including the land of the churches. The call to 'affirmative acts of restitution' has gone largely unheeded thus far.

In a searching contribution to the working documents on church and land edited by the Stellenbosch Economic Project of the Centre for Contextual Hermeneutics in May 1992, E.M. Conradie emphasised the need for the church itself to confess and make restitution:

The church may be called to become aware of its own role in the ownership of land. There are cases where the church has historically acquired land which brought in the process injustice onto the previous inhabitants. And in other cases the church has disposed of its land (which became a burden or embarrassment to them and created a problem of credibility) in such a way that the interests of the local inhabitants were again not taken into account. In such cases "land" may become an aspect of a liturgy of confession of guilt, forgiveness and restitution. The church may, however, also use this land for the establishment of models and projects for the benefit of local communities and thus play a significant role in the process of (rural) transformation (Conradie 1992: 10-11).

The complicity and culpability of the church in the dispossession of black South Africans, with respect both to land acquisition and subsequent land disposition, is well flagged by Conradie, and the movement from liturgy to transformation in his statement is instructive. That liturgy, shared worship of God, is the proper and most promising context for the cultivation of a spirituality of confession and restitution is acknowledged, that this spirituality will then have to be made manifest in actual transfers of land to land-less families and communities is not only a requirement of true repentance, it is also evident from the land claims lodged with the CRLR involving church land. In this connection it is significant that the only restitution claim approved by the Land Court (of 11,130 claims lodged with the CRLR by the end of October 1996) has been that of the Elandskloof Community in the Western Cape, a case wherein the NGK had sold land to a private individual who had subsequently removed the community from their land.

The churches, if not responding dramatically, are at least preparing to respond. In a memorandum prepared by David Storey of Conflict Management Services for Church Leaders, the implications for the churches of the government's land reform programmes (redistribution, restitution and tenure reform) are examined. As Storey observes, all three of the land reform programmes have the potential to affect 'church property and social relations.' With respect to redistribution Storey states, 'land-less groups may make application for used and unused church land located nearby their current informal residential areas' and 'movement and resettlement is likely to evoke unique pastoral needs as people, including surrounding/established communities, deal with the transition' (1996: 2). With respect to restitution, Storey offers an astute analysis of the position facing the churches:

- 6.2.1 Given the unfortunate alignment of the growth of Christianity in South Africa with the extension of colonial control, as well as the consequences of ministering to whites within the constraints of the group areas legislation, many churches may face restitution claims to church property. This would place the church (as an institution) in direct conflict with its congregants.
- 6.2.2 Most churches will be required to minister both to those persons leaving land (current owners of claimed land) and those returning to land (claimants) (1996: 3).

With respect to land tenure reform Storey makes reference to the preferential option for the poor: 'A key component of the mission of the church is to minister to the marginalised and vulnerable. In South Africa, marginality and vulnerability are often directly linked to the relative security of title a grouping possesses' (1996: 3).

Storey urges the churches to be proactive in their response to the challenges presented by the three land reform programmes, not only because of 'the responsibility of the church to contribute to the redress of past discrimination' but also because such an approach would do the following: 1) re-establish/build/maintain trust and respect for the church within congregations and the broader public, 2) allow the church to take moral stands on land reform issues (and encourage its members to follow them), and promote reconciliation with a clear conscience, 3) prepare the church to provide the necessary material and spiritual support/capacity to congregants involved/affected by land reform processes, 4) ensure a positive and central role for the church in a core aspect of the reconstruction and development of our society, and 5) develop certainty in respect of the status of church land and property (1996: 3-4). Storey, in a vision very much in solidarity with the struggles of land-less communities, then lists several specific initiatives the churches may consider within a proactive approach:

1. Initiating relationships with key NGOs involved in land reform such as the National Land Committee and its regional affiliates ...
2. Establishing what claims against church property have already been lodged with the CRLR, as well as the manner in which the churches have acted/reacted thus far in regard to these claims.
3. Conducting an audit of all church land and property with a view to establishing 1) what land is owned as a result of colonial dispossession (pre-June 1913); 2) what land is owned as a result of dispossession based on racially discriminatory legislation; 3) what land is not used and could be given/sold to land-less communities; and 4) what land is used but could be used more effectively by the settlement of land-less communities.
4. Developing a principled framework and implementation methodology for handling claims against the church in respect of land taken before and after 1913.
5. Explore means by which places of worship could continue to be used for their current purpose after the transfer of contested land to its previous owners takes place.
6. Establishing what role church ministers and officials could play in providing capacity for the communities they minister to within land reform processes.
7. Assisting ministers to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to place such a role.

8. Formulating a religious/social/philosophical vision to assist congregants in understanding and relating to land reform, as well as beginning the necessary debates inside church structures to ensure the support of such a vision.
9. Investigating further ways in which the church could act as a communicator of and agent for social change through land reform, including the re-allocation of church personnel and resources to oversee the implementation of church initiatives (1996: 4-5).

Storey has challenged church leaders with a stern test of their commitment to the poor, provided a pastoral and prophetic motivation for a proactive response, articulated an ambitious vision of how the spirituality of confession and restitution may be related to the practicality of land restitution on the ground, and supplied a detailed list of options for what we may call a *mayibuye* praxis of the churches. That the landed churches (as institutions) have a long way to go to come close to the kind of pro-activity that Storey is calling them to is widely acknowledged both within and without the church. From a grounded perspective one of the key linkages made by Storey is that of the pastoral with the prophetic in the ministry and mission of the church; the pastoral work of the church at the local level, where people live, may be said to be the ground of its prophetic role, sustaining a relational commitment to people whom the church knows by name and with whom it suffers, struggles and celebrates. From within such a relationship 'affirmative acts of restitution' may well emerge; they will surely not do apart from such a relationship.

The struggle of rural women for land rights, not treated by Storey, challenges the patriarchy of the churches with respect to life in general and land in particular. For the church to be proactive with respect to the challenge of *womandla!*, in both its hermeneutical and practical dimensions, would be for the church to open itself to the liberating and transforming power of the Holy Spirit in ways that it has largely resisted thus far in its two-thousand-year existence.

## 8.5 Concluding Summary

At the conclusion of the theological hearing on women and land in Driefontein an invitation was issued for final speeches to be made. Mr. C.R. Nqotheni, who had remained silent to that point, then initiated a series of exchanges memorable both for their thematic inclusiveness and their reality-check directness:

With respect to the soil everyone knows that we live on the soil. We live by the soil. And even when we die we will be buried in the same soil. We are not having any argument or any conflict with the soil. But we are having a conflict with the Boers. AmaBuru. We are having a conflict in the following manner: that they did take the land and now say that the land is theirs. For that reason we are roaming all over the places, having no-where to stay. And starving. And this causes us even to steal.

To cultivate the soil and have cattle we know God has given us. The Boers then have taken everything away from us. They have deprived us of the soil. Cattle. Money. Food. Even the fields. We have no place to harvest. Then, as for me, it seems as if we are losing hope. Nothing will come all right, because we are having that conflict with the Boers. As I will be leaving here from this meeting I am going to steal, because actually I am hungry.

[There is general laughter at this point.]

As we are here - being here - our culture, our graves are something greatly to be respected. Now the cattle of these Boers are just stamping on our ancestors' graves! ... And in our struggle, that is how I lost my teeth ... When it is reversed, the history is being reversed, we do feel that they -

[He breaks it off, and there is silence for a time.]

Actually what I am expecting and do wish for is a change of the situation, of the present situation, to be of a better - so that we can live a better life. Through instinct, through our instinct, that is why when we see a person who is white we just take him to be like a Boer.<sup>33</sup>

In response, Baba Dlangamandla stated that he wanted 'to wipe out what the previous speaker said about colour.' 'It is not intended,' said Dlangamandla, 'but actually it is through heartbreak.' Nqotheni had already left the meeting.

It is at this point that arguments linking right and relationality in land restitution, for example that of suffering as a compensable right in land, take on a name and hit home. 'Just and equitable' compensation, to take another example, may not be calculated apart from heartbreak. A personal narrative knowledge of being of the soil but estranged from the soil, of being made to roam, starve, steal and witness the desecration of one's ancestors' graves, of being criminalised following dispossession and deprivation, becomes the ground for a call for the reversal of history and the living of a better life. At the time the *memoria passionis et mortis* weighed so heavily in my spirit that the reversal of resurrection seemed as far away four months after the April 1994 election as it had during the previous decade. Even now the words of the TLRC, 'rural communities are being crucified for claiming their land back,' seem to have more gravitas than do the memories of the *mekete* of the Bakubung and the Bakwena. And yet the Barolong, the Good Friday people of the cross themselves, returned to their land on Easter Day 1995 and are planning their *mokete* for Easter Day 1997. A grounded praxis of *Mayibuye iAfrika!* knows both the suffering of the cross and the joy of the resurrection of the sons and daughters of the soil. In the conjunction of *borapedi* and praxis lies the future of life on the land for us all.

<sup>33</sup> C.R. Nqotheni, Theological Hearing on Women and Land, Driefontein, 25 August 1994, pp.18-19.



## APPENDIX:

## LIST OF INTERVIEWS, CONSULTATIONS AND HEARINGS

Bulhoek Massacre Commemoration, Ntabelanga, Eastern Cape	24.05.92
Theological Hearing, Church of the Israelites, Bulhoek/Queenstown	01-02.07.92
Interview: Rev Othniel Pasha and Rev Roelf Meyer, EAB	08.11.93
TLRC Executive Committee Meetings, Khotso House, Johannesburg	11.93 - 07.94
Consultations: Dr Beyers Naudé and Dr Wolfram Kistner, EAB	11.93 - 09.96
Interview: Bishop Paul Makhubu, Khanya Institute, CAIC	08.12.93
Interview: Archbishop T.W. Ntongana, Jabulani, Soweto	17.12.93
Interview: Rev Bafana Khumalo, Khotso House, Johannesburg	05.01.94
Bible Studies: Mothers' Union, Lesotho Evangelical Church, Johannesburg	01.94 - 12.94
Interview: Mr Harry Makubire, Alexandra	06.01.94
Interview: Mrs Maria Kokoropo, Johannesburg	12.01.94
Interview: Dr Mercy Oduyoye, WCC, Johannesburg	25.01.94
Group Interview: Moletele Community Representatives, WRF, Acornhoek	03.02.94
Group Interview: Mashilane Land Committee, Matibidi, Blydepoort	04.02.94
Interview: Dr Sheena Duncan, Johannesburg	10.02.94
Community Land Conference, Bloemfontein	12-13.02.94
Group Interview: Barolong Action Committee, Ikageng, Potchefstroom	25.02.94
Group and Individual Interviews, Speeches and Prayers, Bakubung Land Return, Molotestad	01.03.94
Graves, Ruins and Narration: Rev Cyprian Ramosime, Bakubung, Molotestad	01.03.94
Theological Hearing, Barolong Action Committee, Ikageng, Potchefstroom	13.03.94
Group Interview: Greenvalley Farmers' Union, Acornhoek	05.04.94
Interview: Willis Ngobe and Lion Chiloane, Dingleydale	06.04.94
Interview: Solomon Mashego, Dingleydale	06.04.94
Group Interview: Dingleydale Farmers	06.04.94
Interview: Dr Itumeleng Mosala, UCT	20.04.94
Interview: Professor John De Gruchy, UCT	20.04.94

Interview: Dr Russel Botman, UWC	20.04.94
Consultation: Dr Weli Mazamisa, Book Launch, UWC	22.04.94
Interview: Chief Leputsoe Mogane and Mrs Rebotile Mogane, Dientjies	18.05.94
Group Interview: Women Farmers, Zoeknag Rice Project	19.05.94
Interview: Mr Barnas Mashego, Greenvalley, Acornhoek	19.05.94
Group Interview: Vanguard of the Moletele Return, Blyde River Canyon	20.05.94
Group Interview: Male Elders, Dinkwanyane	20.05.94
Group Interview: Leroro Community Members, Blydepoort	21.05.94
Interview: Mr Bright Mashego, Leroro	21.05.94
TLRC Annual General Meeting, Safari Hotel, Johannesburg	21.05.94
Group and Individual Interviews, Prayers and Speeches, Bakubung <i>Mokete</i> , Molotestad	28.05.94
Interview: Rev Joshua Seithleko, Ghanzi, Kalahari	01.06.94
Interview: Mrs Qoba Kamuru, Ghanzi Squatter Camp, Kalahari	01.06.94
Interview: Mr Komtjha Kathina, Ghanzi District, Kalahari	01.06.94
Interview: Ds Braam Le Roux, D'Kar, Ghanzi District, Kalahari	02/03.06.94
Group Interview: Komtsha Komtsha and Nharo Elders and Trustees of the Kuru Development Trust, D'Kar, Ghanzi District, Kalahari	03.06.94
Interview: Mr David Kgatitsoe, Mogopa	30.06.94
Group Interview: Community Leaders, Mogopa	30.06.94
Graves, Ruins and Narration: Mr David Kgatitsoe, Mogopa	30.06.94
Interview: Ms Anninka Claassens, CALS, Johannesburg	02.08.94
Interview: Mr Lucas Kgatitsoe, Naledi, Soweto	23.08.94
Group Interview: Vanguard of the Mogopa Return, Mogopa	23.08.94
Theological Hearing: Rural Women's Movement, Driefontein	25.08.94
Group Interview: Cloete Family, Komaggas, Namaqualand	31.08.94
Interview: Ds Peter Grove, Komaggas, Namaqualand	31.08.94
Interview: Ds Malcolm Damon, Port Nolloth, Namaqualand	01.09.94
Group Interview: Komaggas Women and Land, Namaqualand	01.09.94
Interview: Terry Matthews-Grove, Komaggas, Namaqualand	01.09.94
Interview: Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, ASCA Institute	20.09.94
Interview: Archbishop N.H. Ngada and Rev Kenosi Mofokeng, ASCA Institute	27.09.94
Interview: Fr Cosmos Desmond, Braamfontein	29.09.94

## Group and Individual Interviews, Speeches and Prayers,

<i>Mokete</i> , Bakwena ba Mogopa	08.10.94
Interview: Mam Lydia Kompe, MP, Mogopa	08.10.94
Interview: Rev Othniel Pasha, TLRC, Johannesburg	18.12.94
Interview: Mrs Patience Pashe, Alexandra	28.12.94
Interview: Rev Densen Mafinyani, Edinburgh	23.01.95
Interview: Rev Vasco Selcoane, Edinburgh	02.03.95
Interview: Ms Esther Mombo, Edinburgh	19.07.95
Consultation: <i>Borapedi</i> ba Basotho, Presbiteri ea Gauteng Clergy, Johannesburg	13.04.96
Consultation: Mr Stuart Marr, TRAC Research	15.04.96
Consultation: Mr Lucas Kgatitsoe, Naledi, Soweto	23.04.96
Interview: Mr Zakes Nkosi, SACC Land and Covenant Programme, Johannesburg	30.04.96
Consultation: Mr Peter Ntshwe, TLRC, Alexandra	03.05.96
Interview: Mr Joe Seremane, CRLR, Pretoria	10.05.96
Interview: Ms Emma Mashinini, CRLR, Pretoria	16.05.96
Consultation: Mr Tony Harding, CRLR, Legalametse, Northern Province	01.06.96
Consultation: Mashilane Community, CRLR Research Hearings, Blydepoort	04.06.96
Consultation: Setlhare Community, CRLR Research Hearings, Greenvally	05.06.96
Consultation: Moletele Community, CRLR Research Hearings, Acornhoek	06.06.96
Interview: Ms Emma Mashinini, CRLR, Pretoria	10.06.96
Interview: Mr Joe Seremane, CRLR, Pretoria	10.06.96
Consultation: SACC Commission on a Theology of Land, Johannesburg	27.06.96
Consultations: Mashilane Community, CRLR Research Hearings, Blydepoort	07-09.96
Consultations: Setlhare Community, CRLR Research Hearings, Buffelshoek	08-09.96
Interview: Mrs Durkje Gilfillan, LRC, Pretoria	12.08.96
Consultation: LAPC, LRC, CALS, CRLR Forum on Land Claims, Braamfontein	20.08.96
Theological Hearing: Barolong ba Matlwang, Potchefstroom District	24.09.96
Consultation: LAPC, LRC, CALS, CRLR Forum on Land Claims, Johannesburg	01.10.96
Consultation: SACC Land and Covenant Programme, Johannesburg	10.10.96

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